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VISIONS ECSTASY



TONGUES

ON FIRE



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Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy

Lesley Dill

An Artist and the Community Project

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People's Stories

TONGUES
ON
FIRE --- VISIONS
ECSTASY



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cover image by Lesley Dill

People's Stories

TONGUES ON FIRE VISIONS & ECSTASY

Lesley Dill



Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

Artist and the Community

2000 - 2001

Introduction

Since February 2000 Lesley Dill has collected over 700 stories from members of the Winston-Salem community, documenting visions, dreams, spiritual moments and simply inexplicable experiences. These stories were shared via community meetings, e-mail, telephone, letter and questionnaire, and were drawn from diverse parts of the community. Approximately 300 of the responses came from the students and faculty comprising the Governor's School West class of 2000. Other responses came from individuals and groups who the artist met with at Emmanuel Baptist Church; the Forsyth County Public Library, Main Branch; Borders Books and Music; Whistlin' Women; Reynolda House Museum of American Art; Diggs Gallery of Winston-Salem State University and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA). The call for stories went far and wide into the community through posters and advertisements and features in the Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem Chronicle and SECCA's Newsletter. The artist and SECCA's staff wish to thank all of the people who shared their most special and intimate moments with us. This document represents a curated sample of the many stories that were shared with the artist. We invite you to read and share these profound nuggets of human experience that reveal the mystical in everyday life.

— *The stories have been minimally edited for spelling.*

"A" denotes a contributor whose name is withheld.

THE TREE STILL STANDS WATCH, overlooking my house like a distant sentinel, a silent witness to mystery. Many years ago on a warm summer day in my 11-year old life, my grandmother called me to a window.

Pointing to the top of a tall tree, she asked, "Do you see that?" I looked high into the sky at the top of a tree in amazement.

THERE WERE TWO FLAMES, TWIN FLAMES, SITTING ON THE TOP OF THE TREE. They appeared to be just a few inches apart and slightly curved. Flickering with a wavelike motion, they would merge for a split second and then separate again. My grandmother would refer to the twin flames as "TONGUES" when she spoke of this event in later years to family and friends. I don't remember whether we grew tired and simply stopped watching, or if the flames disappeared of their own will, or the will of whomever sent them. No damage was done to the tree. Even at 11 I knew that this was not an ordinary occurrence but didn't know what to make of it. Later that year, 2 Bishops from Grandma's religious organization died within 3 months of each other. I heard her tell many friends that she believed that the twin flames had foretold their passing.

Larry Rice

I HAVE LEFT MY BODY TWICE. The first time I was 16 or 17 years old, and I didn't travel very far. I rose in a fetal position from the body lying in the bed. I could see it below me and as I watched it, I began to spin head over heels, slowly, as though unleashed from gravity. Anxiety and fear forced me to return.

Terri

I WAS BORN WITH A VEIL. When I see visions, I always tell somebody else. They are my witness. It may be six months or a year before the event happens. My brother was coming out of the mountains. It was raining. The car was skidding from one side to the other. I saw this happen while I was at home, and he was in the mountains of Virginia. He was arguing with a girl, and I saw where he got cut— 4 months before it happened. I can be sitting in church and looking around and I see people's spirits, whether they're good or bad spirits.

R.H.

ODDLY ENOUGH, the most INTENSELY BLISSFUL EXPERIENCE I've had was accompanied by the words "NOTHING EXISTS," a direct contradiction to the experience I had gazing at the stars when I was

twelve, but just as true. I knew in that moment that my body, my thoughts and feelings and the rocks and the mountain I was seeing were mirages, shimmering of varying densities and that the truth has no irreducible substance. NOTHING IS REALLY SOLID.

E.

As a shaman in the Hmong culture, I get pains all over my body on the 1st, 15th, and 30th of every lunar month unless I burn incense to appease my spirits. Is that an impulse that I have, or is it an impulse from other spirits? I don't know, my culture barely explains it. These experiences torment me. I am filled with cockiness and pride, and I sin everyday of my life.

Bee Thao

After studying with an advisor regarding his dreams, my brother was asked to consciously attempt to view the palms of his hands while he was dreaming. After six months or so of trying to do just that, one night he was in a dream where he told himself to look. When he did HIS BODY SHOT LIKE A ROCKET FROM THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH UP INTO THE SKY AND EXPLODED INTO CASCADING COLORS. He remembers being astonishingly

exhilarated at what just occurred.

David Brown's brother

When I WAS 5 OR 6 YEARS OLD I often found myself in a sleep-wake state (prior to falling asleep) when I could perceive THE WHOLE OF THE UNIVERSE, THE BABBLE OF ALL SOUNDS COMING TOGETHER in a quiet yet physically alert roar. If I tried to "understand" it, it was gone. Over the course of several years I felt comfortable experiencing this HUM AND BREATHING OF THE UNIVERSE. It stopped after adolescence.

Kay Bloss

For a period of a half an hour I COULD "HEAR" PEOPLE SAY SENTENCES A FEW SECONDS BEFORE THEY WERE SAID. When friends needed an object I was able to hand it to them before any sign or word was relayed. My friends still speak of it.

A.

I NORMALLY GET LOST IN PLACES THAT ARE ALL ONE COLOR. Often when I am writing I begin to feel as though I am recording events as they happen. Following my own mind through some other world.

Josh Booth

One experience or dream I had was BEING LEFT ALONE ON EARTH. No other human besides myself, I was the only living organism on the planet. As I walked the earth to find any source of something living, I felt unhappy, unloved, lonely, gloomy, and dark. While walking I came upon this HOUSE THAT WAS FULL OF LIGHT. It was like the prettiest I've ever seen. This house looked peaceful, happy, and all knowing. As I approach the house, I FALL OFF THE CLIFF. That was the end of the dream.

R.

This is what I thought: One day this beautiful girl crossed my path, I just could not help but look into her eyes, and they were big and had a deep color brown tint to them. And her smile was intensely beautiful. And even to this day I think about that situation.

P.

And I HEARD SOMETHING IN MY HEAD that said, "You really need to be a missionary." And I said, "Oh, well." I was supposed to be an urban missionary. I had an urban background. I wasn't a naturalist or anything like that. This was my mission. This was something higher than me telling me to do something. I became a Quaker. I'm a

criminal defense lawyer. I work with a lot of people who are poor. IT'S HARD TO TALK ABOUT— EXPERIENCES THAT ARE SECRET, PERSONAL.

E.

I had a vision that has stayed with me. It probably came to me about the time I was in school, and that is of a pregnant woman serving communion. And that image has shaped who I am. I'd never seen a pregnant woman ordained to serve communion in a church. I don't know the origin of it, but it's shaped my life into the whole calling of motherhood in ministry. And that has developed through four children and it's developed into a church setting that broadens my vision of a very multi-racial, cross-cultural, cross-economic kind of situation that I'm in now. It's like a SEED OF THAT VISION HAS BLOSSOMED, and I hope continues to bloom. And so that's developed from that one image.

Laura Spangler

I WAS OUTSIDE SOMEWHERE. And I remember looking up in the sky. It was probably partially caused by some sort of sun thing, but all of a sudden I saw in front of me, it was like a circle, and it was INSIDE THE CIRCLE WERE WORDS, WORDS, WORDS. I couldn't quite read the words,

but I somehow FELT like THE ANSWER TO THE UNIVERSE WAS WITHIN THAT CIRCLE and that IF I COULD READ THOSE WORDS I WOULD — I would KNOW ALL THE THINGS THAT I NEEDED TO KNOW. And I did feel a sense of comfort. I didn't quite feel a total sense of comfort because I felt like they were still out of my reach, but I did feel an excitement about realizing that this was something that I could attain, maybe.

Millicent Greason

I HAVE ENVISIONED things concerning my family members more than I care to express. Some things have been good and some have been bad. So would you please allow me not to share at this time? Thank you however for arousing my awareness of my gift. T.

I ALWAYS HAD A DREAM ABOUT FALLING. I was standing on a high building or sometimes not even standing at all. In my dream I could feel myself falling, and as I was falling it took forever for me to touch the ground. My facial expressions were mellow; I wasn't tense or scared. As my dream continued, I never fell. I woke up. I always ask people what the dream is really about. But no one knows. They say if you reach the

ground, you die. So I'm always glad I don't reach the ground.

Alisha Thompson

SOMETIMES, MY BELIEF IN MAGIC IS SO STRONG I choke and I cry when I realize that I will never be able to prove it to myself, ...sometimes, however, in darkness and most often by myself, I know. I know that magic surrounds me, and I feel that it is A TANGIBLE PRESENCE AS YET UNOPENED TO MY SENSES other than my heart.

Deborah Linehan Sosower

The other day I was walking along and I looked at a person and then, in a weird sense, it appeared that THE PERSON SKIPPED A FRAME. And I began to realize, "what if we are at a standstill?" And it is not we that move, but the surroundings. What if we are in a tailored reality that moves for us.

Joseph Martin

This happened to me one day in chemistry class in 10th grade. For a split second I was hunched over my desk and my hair was in the way. All of a sudden, I GOT THIS STRANGE FEELING that I didn't belong to the place. I was in that class, in that seat. And it was all because I had looked at a strand of black hair, which had fallen in front

of my face. The black hair must have reminded me of who I am. I am Chinese-American and I think I forgot that.

Yuanshu Deng

When I went to this big black church and saw the people of all shades of brown waving, clapping, shouting, swaying, and running along the pews I was touched. The pastor was at the front sweating as the word of God came from his lips to our ears. I was moved by what he was saying and could relate to it better than at my own church so I cried happy knowing tears. THAT WAS THE DAY I STOOD in front of the congregation, weepy eyed and was saved.

Evora Juanita Newby

I JUST GAZED at the shimmering water and the marshes and was just still. Everything became clear to me...everything just fell into place. I truly discovered what I want out of life at this point in my life.

L.

FOR SOME REASON we were late picking up my sister. My mom was in a big hurry yet for some reason when we were approaching a stop sign, she didn't pull up all the way, and she even left room for more than another car's length. Suddenly, out of nowhere, this

car came speeding down the road and was hurled around the corner and then it flipped around the stop sign and the car landed right in front of our car leaving only six inches between the two cars. My mom, my sister and I were silent. The man was fine. To this day we don't know why my mom didn't pull up to the sign. IT WAS A MIRACLE— she had never done that before—she doesn't know why she did it.

Courtney Kotsionis

ONE TIME when I was at my grandma's house, and I was using the bathroom, my brother came in and turned the lights off. It was pitch black. When I'm in darkness I see all of these LITTLE FURRY BALLS or different colors and when I was younger I could control them and tell them what to do (like making shapes or objects for example). However, I was much younger. All of the balls in the room came together and formed my grandfather. Then it started to look like a "real" image. I just jumped off of the commode and ran out. Even though I know my grandfather wouldn't hurt me I WAS SO SCARED, the only thing I could do was start running. But if it happened again, I would not run.

Tori Anderson

A FRIEND OF MINE told me that one night she woke up to find her grandfather and grandmother, who was already dead, standing at the foot of her bed. Her grandfather told her not to worry because everything would be all right. The next morning, her parents told her that her grandfather had died during the night.

Carol Barry

I ONCE HAD A DREAM THAT I MELTED INTO NOTHINGNESS. On Earth, everything is tainted with at least a little pain, restlessness or ignorance.

Josh Evans

I visit an acupuncturist once a month. During one visit, I had an experience unlike any I've ever encountered. With the needles firmly in place, I became aware that I was in a state of comfort that was neither sleep nor consciousness. I SAW A FLASH OF WHITE LIGHT that began to grow and cover my entire field of vision. After a few seconds of this, I began to feel frightened and wondered if I was dying. The white color quickly turned a beautiful buttery color and then deepened into an orange and then just as quickly a deep red color. The red color was intense and deeply pleasurable. I was

enveloped in a feeling of complete warmth and comfort. No fear, not thoughts, just pure deep comfort. A voice (my own?) said, "YOU ARE HEALED." I felt nearly giddy but so relaxed. I COULDN'T EVEN SMILE.

Janet Graham

I WAS SITTING ON A ROCK overlooking the ocean and felt so beholden to it – it was the closest thing to a spiritual feeling I've ever had. I felt a biological and spiritual oneness with the ocean and at the same time a kind of indebtedness to it – that IF THERE WERE EVER A REASON FOR ME TO GIVE UP MY LIFE FOR A GREATER CAUSE, I WOULD GIVE IT UP FOR THE OCEAN. I was in my mid-twenties.

L. Wayne

I WAS JUST SITTING here in the den, and a man came into the room." "Did you know this man?" asked my father. "No." "Did you hear the man come into the house?" "No." "What did he look like?" "He was dressed in black." "Did he say anything to you?" "No." "Were you scared at all?" "No." "Well, what was he doing?" "I don't know. He just stood there and looked at me. Then he went away." A few months later she fell out of bed one night. The maid found her on the bedroom floor the next morning and called

the neighbor and 911, and she was taken to the hospital with a broken hip. She contracted other complications and died there within a couple of weeks. Before she died, she told my father the following: "That man," said Grama. "What man?" asked my father. "That man who came into the house before. He was sitting on me when I fell out of the bed, and pressing on me, and I couldn't breathe."

L.W.'s grandmother — Minerva (Ming)

Wayne

WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, my bedroom was on the top floor of an old house. The door to my room opened onto a landing above the stairwell, and one night I saw many TINY LIGHTS like fireflies floating in the space above the stairwell. It was like the reflection of light off of the surface of a lake, but happening in the middle of the air.

Ellen

I AM FREQUENTLY TAKEN OVER BY LANGUAGE AND POSSIBILITY. The sentences come, complex, fully formed. THEY KEEP ME UP AT NIGHT. MY HEAD IS LOUD AND BUSY— I'm thrilled but scared some of the words will slip away. These experiences have made me want to create. I'VE MADE BIG LIFE DECISIONS based on the desire to create.

A.

I LOST MYSELF TO MY SENSES. IT WAS AS THOUGH ALL PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE LEFT ME AND I FELT WEIGHTLESS. It was not being reborn or seeing things for the first time, but rather opening to my surroundings to such an extent that I became part of them. I did not feel separated from anything or alone because I had no sense of myself. I have felt bliss when I have felt love.

T.

I ONCE SAW A LIGHT in the sky that was tightly circling something. At first, I thought it was a helicopter, but then I realized that it was also moving vertically in a corkscrew like fashion; moving too fast for any aircraft I know of.

A.

I experienced a perfect moment when EVERYTHING SEEMED TO SLOW OR STOP AND THE SONG OF ALL THINGS seemed to be in perfect harmony with the song of my soul. There have been a couple of times when I sat down to write and the WORDS JUST FLOODED IN and I barely had time to get them all down before they were forgotten.

Colyn Holloway

SOMETIMES I START THINKING about what makes me me, instead of somebody else. In these moments, MY MIND SEEMS TO ESCAPE FROM MY HEAD and wander around the room, searching for the answer as to why it was not in anybody else's head.
N.

There's a recurring dream that I have: There's one man. SILENT, I RECOGNIZE HIM. HE LOOKS CRAZY EVERYWHERE EXCEPT HIS EYES. We make eye contact and talk that way...communication without speech. I ALWAYS WAKE UP LONELY.
Mandy Pritchard

IT WAS WEIRD, but I can explain it. I was diagnosed with three leaky valves in my heart. Not a big problem, but it worried my mom. One day we were at Pizza Villa and this old lady walked up and asked if anyone in our family had heart problems. So my grandma told her about me and she prayed for me. Now only one of my valves leaks.
Lindsay Lewis

ONE NIGHT, I had a really bad dream about death and I was crying. Suddenly, a beam of moonlight started to shine in my room and I HEARD A VOICE. I don't know

if it was all in my mind or if it was real. This voice told me that I would be okay and not to worry. I have never felt so peaceful.

G.

Love, changing me, REVEALING ME, to myself. Words cannot explain. This pen cannot explain. SMALL VISIONS however, small revelations in my life, have slowly built up to change me, change who I am, change who I want to be.

Cory Finnern

HOW do people I have never met or seen before suddenly visit me?

D.

IT WAS A DEFINING EXPERIENCE IN MANY RESPECTS FOR ME. I had a very intense relationship with my dad, and when I was sixteen years old I had a dream, and in this dream I was in this airplane, and my dad is sitting next to me. I'm sitting next to my dad, and suddenly the plane begins to shake, and we both look at each other and we both realize that we're going to make a crash landing. What happens in the dream is the plane sure enough does crash and I, in the dream, experience the impact and I can see the shards of fuselage and I'm viewing them just moving past me. And then quiet, and the

wreckage, and I'm sitting strapped to my seat and my dad is no longer there. And I'm alone. AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL—the skies are absolutely beautiful. And there's all this wreckage flying around the airplane. THAT YEAR MY FATHER DIED. I had forgotten about the dream. I mean, completely. What was really amazing to me is the dream came back to me at the film screening. I went to see this film called 'Fearless', and Fearless is basically the story of a person that survives an airplane crash. And, I'm thinking I'm going to go and see a film, not thinking about this—anything related to my dad. I walk into the theater, and as the film started I felt this really strange feeling. I was just, what is going on here, what is going on here? And then during the sequence, (in the film there's this long drawn out sequence where the plane is about to crash) I just realized that I had experienced this. I had experienced this visually. I had experienced this emotionally. Everything. THIS WAVE OF EMOTION FLOODED THROUGH ME AND I STARTED WEeping IN THE THEATER, and I had to actually leave the theater. And the feeling that I got after that experience was that I indeed was a survivor. And it was incredibly powerful because, I mean, cinema is a dream, in and of itself, is it not? It kind of struck me as being really incredible to

have this deep buried kind of memory unlocked, you know. A real public setting, you know—I thought it was a tremendously powerful thing because it forced me to experience a lot of feelings that I had buried, related to my dad and all these inhibitions. And I've always thought that that was a very important thing that occurred. So, that's my experience.

W.

I'VE BEEN TO PLACES WHERE I CAN SEE WORDS STRIPPED OF PARTICULAR CONNOTATIONS. Where I could see a word in the midst of all these connotations.

F.

I'VE HAD WORD REVERIES OR SOMETHING, where a word or a certain stream of words or different words jumbled—or not jumbled, are individually springing up all at the same time and all these possibilities of meaning. And I watch it. I am really angry when it happens. I mean, it's like so much. FOR A TIME I HAVE LIVED PRETTY CLOSE TO THE REAL REGISTER OF LANGUAGE.

N.

I'VE HAD A REPEATED DREAM OF GETTING READY TO PREACH ON A

SUNDAY MORNING, and I'm not ready. And I'm getting up to the pulpit and I'm barefooted. I had this vision of me standing there in the pulpit in Wake Forest and I WAS NAKED, AND I HAD NO SHOES ON. The bare feet for me became a real connection with the earth, a healing project for me just to remember that it was that sustaining presence as a child.

Lynn Rhoades

I grew up in Maine and I had a bedroom window that looked out onto some woods. One morning when I was 14, I was getting ready to go to school, and I was sitting on my bed looking out this window at the dark leaves against the sky. And somehow, my whole visual screen was filled with a sort of web like spiral of images that were black on white or white on black. And at that moment, I WAS GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD, I understood pestilence, sorrow, and the hugeness of everything, and I understood that there was a pattern through everything— and that it was all right. This was accompanied by a feeling of BLISS, which I had never experienced before.

Lesley Dill

Something happens which seems to involve various important components operating

within a stable structure. All you need to do (it seems – at least for the moment) is describe or capture that structure...

D.B.

Everything. I can't explain myself. I can't explain the world. I can't explain the way things are. I JUST DON'T KNOW!!

Erin Staton

When I was visiting my grandparents on their farm in Tennessee, we were all eating lunch in a room that looked out upon this huge grass field. We noticed some sort of metallic object of slight size shimmering in the sunlight. We were all unsure of what it was that could be metallic and big enough to be seen by us so far away. My grandfather could not think of what it was that he may have left there that would produce such an effect. We went to put on our shoes to go look, but when we ventured out to the field it was gone. The strange thing was that the next day two cows were missing, with no sign of them anywhere. Could it have been a UFO? Or was it all some weird coincidence?

Randy Shelton

I have a recurring dream that I stand on a slightly elevated "bump" in an open field. I could feel the "openness": It is the feeling of

the MOST OPEN YOU CAN GET, THEN DOUBLED. It was amazing. I look forward to dreaming.

A.M.

There is no peacefulness.

S.M.

I have daily moments of INTENSE JOY, almost pathological maybe— life is an INFINITE SEQUENCE of miracles.

G.S.

My grandfather died on New Year's Eve. That night when I was in bed, I had a feeling that something bad was going to happen, before I knew he had died. When my mom came in my room to tell me it seemed like I already knew.

A.C.

The one dream that I'll remember until I die was the day after my father was buried. I dreamt that I was at his wake and all of a sudden everyone walked out except me. I walked up to his casket to say my good-byes and when I turned around to leave, he said, "Don't leave me. Don't leave me, Duke!" (my nickname) and I turned back around to look at the casket and my father was holding out his hand to me. I burst into tears and I

woke up out of my dream crying in my sleep. I was hesitant to tell my mother but I did and all she told me is that he just misses us.

Annbec DeShied

When my mom was a very young girl she had to ride the bus home from school. One day when she got off, the bus was turning to get around a car, and it was heading straight for her. She automatically froze, but suddenly she felt somebody pick her up by her shoulders. She wasn't hit. She turned to see who moved her, and nobody was there. She believes it was her guardian angel.

Tiffany Banwart

I WAS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING AND I DIDN'T DIE.

Kattie Slagle

One time I blew out a candle and was about to leave the room. I turned around at the doorway and the candle lit up again as I watched it from across the room. I have learned that some things can't be explained.

Chris Fratello

The time continuum appeared to have slowed down and everything was really clear. At the moment the past, present, and future seemed to have blended together. It is the

absence of those concepts that govern the natural world that define the moment as “perfect”. So really the metaphysical aspect of this and many other moments like it keep them etched in my mind.

S.K.

My parents and I were coming home from a visit with my grandmother. Since we hadn't eaten, we stopped at a Wendy's. There was an old lady at a nearby table with the longest, whitest hair I have ever seen. Upon exiting she passed by my mother and I and began to speak. She told me I was meant for great things and that if I followed love and my God-given instincts, I would change the world. SHE LOOKED RIGHT THROUGH ME, and HER EYES TOLD ME she knew my thoughts and fears; almost as if she knew me. Horace D. Ballard, Jr.

I've had feelings of the world rushing by as if in fast motion or double time while I was caught in slow motion. It was as if the world were on adrenaline and I wasn't given a dose, but merely left behind to watch. I've also had a feeling (very intense) that I couldn't exist anywhere— that there was nowhere in the world to go— that I WAS ON THE EDGE OF COMBUSTING— so I would close my eyes

and tense my whole body till the inexplicable feeling went away.

A.

I was listening to a music concert in San Francisco – it was contemporary and avant-garde and I closed my eyes to really listen. As I did, these images kept unfolding in my head like a kaleidoscope, for example, a skeleton floating on the water – the ribs opened to reveal a flower that opened into fins that swam to the bottom of the water, through the muddy earth and reached into flames, etc. – the final image was of the earth (blue/green planet) resting on a hand which turned out to be mine – it's hard to describe – but it was very moving.

K.K.

I dreamed my window would be broken by the wind. I awoke to tell my mother about this dream and from the living room I HEARD THE BREAKING GLASS.

A.

The night my grandfather died, my friend said that she saw him at the foot of her bed saying, “I am okay.”

A.

Out of nowhere and for no particular rea-

son, I sometimes become driven to write. Sometimes I do not even understand the emotions behind the passion to do, to write, but I FOLLOW THE WORDS WITH MY EYES AS THEY FLOW across the page. I am them, they are me.

Crystal Harward

I couldn't explain to anyone why I wanted to disappear, to slip away. I knew I had my reasons. We become so immersed in our own noise we often become utterly disoriented. I have felt falsely all knowing several times. I COULD STARVE MY WAY TO BLISS.

A.

I have lost track of time and HAD A PERFECT MOMENT ONCE when I was playing my viola. I started playing and I just needed to keep playing. I was content and one with my instrument. It felt like the first time I played it and before I knew it six hours passed.

A.

I can remember a dream and it is the worst memory I have. I dreamt that my family was out somewhere and someone took away my mom and dad and sister, and I was left alone. When I tried searching for them, they were nowhere to be found. I WAS ALL ALONE

IN THAT NEVER ENDING SPACE.

A.

My mother and I both felt that there was going to be a medical emergency with my brother's baseball game. Almost telepathically we both saw him being injured while at bat, and when he stepped up to the plate, we were both in the dugout ready to help carry him to the car to go to the hospital. We were right. I have learned to trust my gut instincts and visions. More importantly, I have learned to trust my mother and grandmother's visions.

Elizabeth Nowell

There are CONNECTIONS I have felt which cannot be explained away; instantaneous attachments to people I barely know but that I immediately feel I should know.

A.

"Am I really here?" Sometimes, when I am very quiet, or perhaps when the world around me is very loud, WORDS COME TO ME IN RAPID ORDER, prearranged, God-given. These become my poetry. Not forced or required but GIFT-LIKE IN ARRIVAL and free in being, simple vision of complexity. Visions, chimerical and fleeting, have taught me an appreciation for the higher powers

which transcend logic and define the human condition.

A.

It's like my body is completely at peace and MY INSIDES HAVE MELTED INTO LIQUID LIGHT and all my thoughts are LUCID AND CALM.

A.

Everything that I experience affects my life in some way. Good or bad I am constantly changing the dynamics of my life to counteract or progress the affect of my experiences. I have been inspired to become no matter what obstacles.

A.

My mom woke up one morning and just knew that we had to go visit my great-grandmother that day. So we did, and the nursing home called two days later and told us she had died.

A.

I sat on a hill, marveling at the entirety of creation and was suddenly OVERWHELMED BY A SENSE OF KNOWING and perceiving things completely unknown to the rest of society. It is such an overpowering and all encompassing emotion to feel com-

pletely enlightened yet at the same time set apart and alone. It can be sad, but yet is mainly a feeling of joy.

A.

I had an experience of enlightenment once after staring at a painting for two hours. It somehow enabled me to better analyze and see beauty in so many other things. The feeling I had while in that moment will never leave me.

A.

The feeling of extreme bliss and exhilaration that I feel when I perform in a play is so wonderful. I can't describe the emotions and feelings and thoughts that play through my mind.

A.

One night, I was having trouble sleeping. When I finally went to sleep, I found myself in a room with a lot of other people, I looked around, trying to figure out what was going on. Next, I heard a person reading names off a list. MY NAME WAS CALLED. This person told me to go to a door on the left side of the room. I WALKED IN AND THE ROOM WAS ON FIRE. I screamed. An angel told me the things I've done caused me to go to hell.

A.

Once I had a feeling take over my body. It was not a bad feeling, but was odd! It was almost as if some spirit or something had entered my body.

A.

A dream I had that I always remember was where I saw a huge fire and out of it rose a firebird. It was beautiful, graceful. Suddenly dragons flew in and they seemed to take part in a magical dance, flying higher and higher, until all eyes were turned to them. They flew as one into one point and merged, filling the sky with a BRILLIANT, BEAUTIFUL LIGHT OF MANY COLORS that filled the sky.

A.

I once had a vision of my mother, my birth mother. I was aware that it was her, but for some reason she looked just like my mother – my adoptive mother. I was thinking about how she'd look, and there was a vision of my mom with a beautiful smile holding me as a baby in her arms. My vision has helped me realize that although I might not ever need my birth mother, I am in fact the child of my adoptive mother, all that she is and that she has ever been is inside me, and I am content

and I do not ask questions any longer.

Jamie DeLong

TIME STOOD STILL. I was moving and breathing, but everything around me was motionless. The sky lit up, light imprinted the moment in my memory forever.

A.

Once I thought I saw an angel standing in front of me. It scared me to death. After a few seconds it disappeared and THE WIND BEGAN TO BLOW.

A.

When I was in the fifth grade, my mom underwent tests to determine if she had breast cancer. On the day she went to the hospital to have a lump removed, I spent the day alone, walking through the woods. I came to a clearing, and suddenly a light illuminated everything around me, like the world had stopped and taken a breath. I felt incredible peace and reassurance, like I had arms holding me, and I knew, without reason, that my mother would be all right.

A.

I think that everything a person experiences affects them, even if it is in the most insignificant way possible.

A.

A dream that simmered into my night left me in dismay and intense curiosity. A DARK TUNNEL which seemed cold and undesirable, TURNED INTO A PATH. At the conclusion of this part, a light shone brightly with a RADIANT GLOW.

A.

When I was little (5 years old or so) I was completely CONVINCED THAT I HAD BEEN BORN BEFORE and that I was living a second life exactly parallel to the first. I have no idea where I got this notion of my reincarnation, but it eventually faded as I got older. I found a beautiful quartz once lying in the grass in a playground and felt an overwhelming déjà vu. This was my rock, and somehow I felt like I had lost it before, but I finally found it again. I sometimes feel complete peace with everyone in the room. I look at all the people and feel as if we are all one person, and it makes me very happy.

A.

Coming home to find the furniture rearranged when you live alone. Having all the items you display in your home moved consistently to different positions each time you arrange them.

A.

THE AIR IS LIKE A DRINK – it actually makes me feel whole.

A.

One night, after project graduation, it was 1:30 am and I was about to fall asleep. I gazed out my window and the moon had these weird lights coming out of it in the SHAPE OF A CROSS. The bottom one was even longer than the rest. I had been praying recently for an answer to a question and I believe that God was telling me to have FAITH and things will be okay. I thought at first it was a window glare until I stood up and looked at all angles only to discover that this really was a cross in the sky. I AM NOT ALONE.

A.

I don't think I've ever had a vision, but I've certainly had intense inspiration at times, mostly when I am the most still and just QUIETLY CONTEMPLATING, not striving. I've had moments so 'perfect' that I became almost detached from the moment, and observed "I'll remember this for the rest of my life" or thought, "this is bliss."

Amelia Rosenberg

I feel this often, like God is talking to me through my thoughts.

A.

My grandmother was in a really terrible car accident and was injured badly. She spent a lot of time in physical therapy but didn't see much improvement. She went to visit a man who people called a "healer" and he completely changed her and healed her body. IT SOUNDS TOTALLY STRANGE BUT I BELIEVE IT and it's amazing.

A.

I feel a special connection to my brother that sometimes makes me impossibly aware of what is happening to him. Sometimes if he is hurt or in danger, I am uneasy and have a sense of his pain when I have no knowledge of the situation.

A.

After dreaming and recalling dreams I often feel a strong awareness of my spirit.

A.

I've literally seen 100 children praying on a beach – then suddenly they vanished.

A.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I COULD VISUALIZE THINGS SO INTENSELY that I could see my visions turning into reality. I could see doorknobs turning in my mind and made myself really believe they were moving.

A.

A few weeks after my best friend's grandmother died. She woke up in a panic from a bad dream. There was a woman at the foot of her bed who stroked her hair until she went back to sleep. The next morning, she realized it had been her grandmother.

Courtney Birk

Once, at a basketball game, my friend greeted me and as he was walking down the bleachers, I had a rapid succession of pictures flashing through my mind of him. He was lying on his back in the dark on an abandoned street and blood was coming out of his mouth. I pushed the images from my head. Apparently as he was driving home that night, his car ran off the road and someone found him later lying unconscious on the road. He was all right only a little shaken when I heard about it the next day.

Lorna Fertig

Sometimes, while trying to go to sleep, my

eyes would be closed and I'd feel like I was spinning – not an uncomfortable feeling, but sort of comforting and tiring. Once, during a prayer – I felt called to be a minister. I INTEND TO FOLLOW THE CALLING.

A.

Near the end of church service a chant was played on the sound system. The chant was going over and over in my head and A STRANGE FEELING SWEEPED OVER ME, and I saw a shadow of a face on a wall in the sanctuary. I just remember feeling so at peace. Then it all just left and I started crying.

Meredith Warden

A few nights before Hurricane Floyd, I had a dream. My grandfather appeared spontaneously and said to me, "this one is going to cause major damage. Leave while you can baby." As suddenly as he appeared, he disappeared. I told my mom what granddaddy said, and we packed up and left before the storm got close. After the storm was over, I realized that he saved us. Our area was hit very hard. We didn't lose our home, but we had plenty of damage.

A.

I HAD A VISION of a mother and a young child in a casket. The mother was holding the child in her arms, and they looked as if they were asleep. I couldn't see the faces; I just saw the figures. I told my mother because I always tell her about my dreams and visions. Two weeks after the dream, mom's co-worker's daughter was killed. They tried to save the child, but she died. We went to the funeral, and there was the exact casket and scene that I saw in the vision. I was really shaken up.

A.

Sometimes I feel guilty for not being able to tell the people in my dreams what's going to happen. I can't see faces, just figures. Other times I'm grateful for the warning.

A.

I had a moment of clarity when everything made sense. I stood back and looked at the world in AWE.

A.

On the day of the PSAT, I was so upset because I didn't know what to put for career and major choices. It upset me that I had no idea about my future. I started to cry, when it hit me that God was calling me to be a minis-

ter. It was in that one moment I REALIZED MY CALLING and knew that I would graduate from college and then go into the ministry. I guess you could call that intense, instant inspiration. Not only has this vision helped me grow in Christ, it has put me on my path to college and a career. I have always been a very religious person, but that inspiration inspired me to strive harder to grow through God.

A.

I was sitting on my bed relaxing and looking outside my window at the tree across from it and the stars. It was at about dusk so it was still fairly bright outside and also the streetlights had already been turned on, further illuminating the sky. As I recall this it's sort of weird because I can't really remember why I decided at that moment to look out my window. I had been staring at my window for about thirty seconds when I saw A ROUND GREEN LIGHT come down from the top of the sky and just hover in the sky about fifty feet over my neighbor's houses. It must have been about 400 feet away because I couldn't make out anything except the greenish light. It stayed there for 20 seconds and then slowly levitated back up. I remember hearing a light chirping sound in my head and being almost entranced by it. I stared at it the

whole time and almost got the sense that it looked back at me and had realized I was watching it and decided to leave.

A.

*POETIC EXCERPTS FROM VISION
STATEMENTS*

The room is on fire
The air is like a drink
My insides melt into liquid light
I hear a voice
She tells me her secrets
Am I really here?
The world has stopped – taken a breath
He looks crazy everywhere but his eyes
I'm drowning in light
I fall to the ground.

I am frequently taken over by language and possibility.
I lose myself to my senses.
Experience leaves me and I feel weightless.

A light in the sky that was tightly circling
Slow
Stop
Song of all things seemed to be in perfect harmony with the song of my soul.
Words flood in
What makes me me, my mind

Escape
 My head
 Wander around the room,
 Why was it not in anybody else's head?

I dreamt my window would be broken by the
 wind.
 Breaking glass
 Emotions behind the passion
 I am them, they are me.

Silent, I recognize him.
 He looks crazy everywhere except his eyes.
 Communication without speech

I always wake up lonely.
 I couldn't explain to anyone why I wanted to
 disappear.
 Immersed in our own noise
 Utterly disoriented
 I could starve my way to bliss.

I am all alone in a never ending space.
 I am content and I do not ask questions any
 longer.
 I felt like I was dying for seven seconds.

How do people I have never met or seen
 before suddenly visit me?
 Everything around me was motionless
 Sky lit up.

Light imprinted the moment in my memory
 forever.

My belief in magic is so strong I choke and
 I cry
 In darkness.
 I know
 Unopened to my senses,
 The wind began to blow.

I constantly feel I'm not alone,
 I'm being watched.
 And it is not us that moves, but the surround-
 ing.
 This strange feeling that I didn't belong to
 the place.

Light illuminated
 The world has stopped and taken a breath.
 A dark tunnel,
 Turned into a path
 Radiant glow
 Vision of music.

The overwhelming sensation of being con-
 stantly misunderstood
 Lonely when surrounded by friends and family.
 The air is like a drink.
 It makes me feel whole.
 A cross in the sky.
 I am not alone.

Intense inspiration.

When I'm in darkness I see

Ultimate peacefulness,

I just shut down.

I looked into her eyes and start crying
Something jumped out and bit me.

Premonitions

There are connections I feel which cannot be
explained away;

Instantaneous attachments

My friend and I say exact words at the exact
time,

Bondage between souls.

Am I really here?

When the world around me is very loud,
words come to me in rapid order, prearranged
Gift-like in arrival

Simple vision of complexity.

My insides melt into liquid light

Constantly changing

I inspire to become

Entirety of creation

Overwhelmed

Set apart and alone

Joy.

Person reading names off a list.

My name was called

I walked in and the room was on fire.

A beam of moonlight started to shine in my
room.

I heard a voice.

I don't know if it was all in my mind or if it
was real.

Small visions

Small revelations

Change me, change who I am, change who I
want to be.

Firebird

Flew in

Flying higher and higher

Flew as

Filling the sky

Light of many colors

Sky.

She tells me her secrets.

"This is bliss."

Talking through my thoughts.

It sounds totally strange but I believe it and
it's amazing.

I've seen 100 children praying on a beach —
suddenly they vanish.

I'm in an all white room and I'm wearing all
white and I have to dance.

There was a woman at the foot of her bed who
stroked her hair.

Intend to follow the calling.
Bright flash of light,
I was drawn toward the light.
I woke up before I got to the light.

Falling, falling, falling, only to land gently
on the ground upon waking up.
I couldn't see the faces;
I just saw the figures.
I had a moment of clarity
I stood back
Depth knowledge.

I once had a dream that I melted into noth-
ingness.
On earth, everything is tainted with at least a
little pain, restlessness or ignorance.
The wind was blowing very hard and I could-
n't see anything but a bright light.
I feel disoriented in the dark.
An odd out-of-body sensation.
I realized my calling.

Around green light came down from the
top of the sky and just hovered in the sky.
Direct contact with the angelic realm,
Delirious
Delusional.

Split me off from the bodily reality,
Blinding and confusing.
I finally reach the point of freedom.
Plurality and communion
Left me alone, paralyzed, in my own world.

Leaves me stunned.

I wrote it all down and turned it into a
poem.

This exhibition and series of projects was organized by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and the North Carolina Arts Council, an agency funded by the State of North Carolina and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

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This exhibition premiered at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, from May 12 through July 1, 2001 and will travel to selected venues through 2003.

an hour I could "hear" people say sentences a few seconds before they were said. When friends needed an object I was at

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Introduction

Lesley Dill's *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* is the tenth project in SECCA's ongoing *Artist and the Community* program. Begun in 1994, this series has included projects by Donald Lipski, Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival), Fred Wilson, Hope Sandrow, Willie Birch, Eleanor Antin, Maya Lin, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, Mr. Imagination, and now, Lesley Dill. Designed as a series of artists' residencies leading to the creation of new work, the series focuses on issues critical to Winston-Salem—a community of 187,500. During their residencies, participating artists work to establish links with community-based institutions and groups and a wide range of diverse community members.

The *Artist and the Community* program has witnessed many successes, but Lesley Dill's *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* project has exceeded all expectations. It has been a privilege to be involved in some small way in this project, and I envy my colleagues and the community members who have been involved in this project even more directly. *Tongues on Fire* has had great impact on their lives and that impact will continue to resonate.

The essays so eloquently written by David J. Brown, Senior Curator; Terri Dowell-Dennis, Curator of Education; Belinda Tate, Director, Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University; the Reverend John Mendez; and Nancy Princenthal bear witness to the importance of this project. As noted by Terri Dowell-Dennis, this project has indeed been a "spiritual journey." The catalogue and exhibition are our ways of inviting you to join us on that journey.

Our deepest gratitude goes to Lesley Dill for her incredible vision and energy and for opening our eyes and hearts to so many different ways of seeing, feeling, and believing. My personal thanks goes to all the SECCA staff who have worked so hard on this project, in particular David J. Brown, Terri Dowell-Dennis, Mark Linga, Douglas Bohr, and Angie Debnam.

Vicki Kopf

Acting Executive Director
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

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Many people have contributed to the success of *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*. Without their bountiful support, enthusiasm, and assistance, none of this would have been possible.

I wish to thank the many individuals who shared their visions with the artist. I particularly wish to praise the encouragement and devotion of the congregation of Emmanuel Baptist Church, especially the Reverend John Mendez, Pastor; Sammie Torbit; Dwight Davis; Colin Scott; Ann Loyd; and the members of the spiritual choir, including Esther Boulware; Priscilla Dixon; Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Dodd; Eleanor Eaton; Juanita Hagood; Ester Hood; Samella Hunt; Mary Jenkins; Willie Johnson; Floscille Jones; Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Jordan, Sr.; Katherine Joyner; Robin Kirby; Daisy Larry; Kathy Marshall; Janet McCoy; Lucille Monroe; Mr. and Mrs. Walter Murray; Sulula Presnell; Joyce Redfern; Gwendolyn Russell; Sanclary Saunders; Everett Scott; Arnette Shules; Demanuel Sims; Maria Strickland; Gloria Swindell; Belinda Tate; Annie Thorpe; Sammie Torbit and Mrs. Bobbie Torbit; Shanekqwa Torbit; Mr. and Mrs. David Torbit; Mr. and Mrs. Willie Torbit, Sr.; Myrtle Wall; and Adrienne Wharton. May many new choirs come forth and carry on your thunder.

For the documentary film, I thank the North Carolina School of the Arts School of Filmmaking, especially Dean Dale Pollock, and Professor Steven Jones, for his patience and knowledge, and for guiding some special NCSA students. I also thank film producer Evie Hornik and cinematographers Nicolas Reynolds, David Speck, Jamie Hall, Aaron Clark, Jerry Crimes, and Tiffany McMichels. For the photo shoot: Jackson Smith, Colin Scott, Dana C. Johnson, Joe Morgan, Cameron Dennis, Max Dennis, Shahla McDowell, Shaharзад McDowell, William Chestnutt, Belinda Tate, Rev. John Mendez, Sammie Torbit, Bobbie Torbit, Julianna Foster, Cameron Whitley, Pollyanna McDowell, and Lyndon Bray.

I owe a heartfelt thanks to the SECCA board and staff, especially: Acting Director Vicki Kopf, for steering a steadfast course; Curator of Education Terri Dowell-Dennis, who logged many hours on this project in many capacities; Assistant Curator of Education Mark Linga, for his valuable insight and help with the film; Associate Curator Douglas Bohr, who, as

usual, performed many head-spinning tasks too numerous to mention; Programs Assistant Angie Debnam for attending to the demanding details of the Programs Department. Other SECCA staffers deserving thanks are Karin Lusk, Cameron Whitley, Susan Boone, David Mooneyham, Lisa Kammel, Amy Garland, LaTonya Broome Richardson, and the newest member, Alyson Watts. The Golden Hammer Award goes to the members of the SECCA installation crew: Lyndon Bray, Peter Spivak, Eric Jackson, and Brian Sides. Let's not forget SECCA interns Lori-Beth Russell and Julianna Foster.

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For the essays in this publication, I bow graciously to the contributions offered by Terri Dowell-Dennis, Curator of Education at SECCA; Belinda Tate, Director of Diggs Gallery, Winston-Salem State University; Reverend John Mendez, Pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church; and Nancy Princenthal.

Finally, it has been an honor to work with the generous soul that is the artist Lesley Dill. She has inspired all of us to celebrate life's simple but special moments. Demonstrating the power of art on us all, she has imprinted the lives of many people in this community forever. She asks that this publication be dedicated to her mother, to new love, and to the Emmanuel Baptist Church.

djb



A Gentle Flame

I think our society doesn't value these times and I wonder why is that? Are we afraid of being thought crazy? Are we afraid people won't believe us? Or that they will? When people tell me their stories of visions and experience, there's a gentleness and quietness. It's as if they've been opened up in a way they can't forget. I think the world can use more of this gentle flame.—Lesley Dill, in a letter to Reverend John Mendez

Life is big, fast, and complicated. What we perceive as reality is only the reflection of a system of learned and manufactured responses to our environment and our culture. We are bombarded inescapably by messages that we're too fat, can't function without new gizmos, need to invest in promising stocks, and are helpless when it comes to global warming or voting for a president. Distracted by such fare, we pay too little attention to the tiny acts that connect us to one another. We overlook life's poignant moments, those that give substance to mystery.

In *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*, Lesley Dill looks beyond the limited mask of reality—or, as she refers to it, “the normal cadence of life.” Her artistic investigation began with the seemingly simple yet complex act of availing her soul to hundreds of residents from this region, in the process making herself very vulnerable. Her selfless generosity opened many doors, led to the formation of strong personal relationships, and charted a vibrant new direction for her work and life.

In January 2000, Dill was asked to partake in a residency at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem as part of the museum's *Artist and the Community* series, a program that dates back to 1994. This landmark series brings nationally recognized artists to the Piedmont region of North Carolina to work with diverse community groups in realizing projects that are both specific to this area and challenge the artist to seek new directions of activity. In some cases, such as this one, the effects on the artist, the community, and even the

contemporary art museum experience, can be transforming.

According to Lesley Dill, “The project started from a seed of an idea, and a curator and a museum saying yes, and then ultimately a community saying yes.” She followed this statement with a quote from Emily Dickinson: “There is a small italic seed, a blossom of the brain.” Early discussions of the project generated a host of seeds, some falling to the side and others taking root, slowly taking shape and gaining direction.

Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy evolved into a multi-tiered project: an exhibition of new works inspired by more than 700 vision statements collected by the artist; a series of large billboards strategically placed on a major North Carolina highway and duplicated in the museum for the exhibition; an opening night Spiritual Sing with the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir; a documentary film by the North Carolina School of the Arts chronicling the history of the choir and Dill's involvement with it; and finally, two publications, this catalogue and an edited printed collection of the 700 vision statements.

As a young teen, Dill had a vision, one that she had kept hidden until this project. “I grew up in Maine and had a bedroom window that looked out onto some woods. One morning when I was fourteen and was getting dressed for school, I sat on the bed and looked out the window at the dark leaves against the sky. Somehow, my whole visual screen was suddenly filled with a sort of weblike spiral of images that appeared black on white or white on black. At that moment, I was given to understand the world. I understood pestilence, sorrow, and the hugeness of everything. I understood that there was a pattern threaded through all things—and that it was all right. This was accompanied by a feeling of bliss, which I had never experienced before.” During this project, Dill discussed this vision and other experiences at every public presentation. Her willingness to share her thoughts and visions on such a personal level erased the barriers between her and her audience. It also fostered an environment of respect in which everyone's voice was equally important.



Dill's longtime investigations into the physicality of language and experience prepared her to expand her individual spiritual journey into a community effort. Over the past several years, Dill has collaborated with other artists, dancers, and students in her staged performances, university residencies, and a series of billboards done in conjunction with GraphicStudio, the Institute for Research in Art in Tampa, Florida. In all of these activities, Dill relied on pre-existing poetic phrases from the works of Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Salvador Espriu, and others, to conjure up her images. Now, she would alter her working process by using not pre-existing texts, but rather the vernacular visionary language of people from all walks of life.

Working with SECCA, Dill devised methods of collecting visions, mystical experiences, dreams, and moments of wonder that are natural and inspiring to us all. She met with the community during public presentations in a range of settings: libraries, bookstores, churches, schools, colleges, and universities. She and SECCA canvassed the area with posters, newspaper and radio announcements. SECCA established a special e-mail comment box available through the museum's website and added a voice mailbox to the museum's phone system. Dill also listened to hours of stories in one-on-one settings.

During Dill's public presentations, her natural warmth and sincerity quickly erased barriers and eliminated hierarchy. These meetings were informal gatherings, as when old friends might meet. She often enriched her presentations with the language of poets: "I have given my whole life to words" (Espriu); "Take all away from me, but leave me ecstasy" (Dickinson); "My soul dressed in silence rises up" (Dickinson).

Audience members received a questionnaire describing the project and providing a forum for sharing intimacies with the artist. Attached cards requested personal information, but also allowed the participant to remain anonymous. The questionnaire asked such questions as: Have you ever experienced feelings of peacefulness, bliss, rapture, or all-knowingness? Have you ever experienced anything that you couldn't explain?

How have any of these experiences affected, inspired, or transformed your life?

From the resulting collection of vision statements, Dill selected segments that reflected "people's personal experience with the mysterious." According to the artist, "These stories revealed how complex and how simple this mysticism is. They're all about this tension. Everything has a context of complication that has some acceptance of the range of life. It's not sweet or sentimental as we thought it might prove to be. It's not one point of pure understanding. It's rich—it mirrors life that way."

In July 2000 Dill took her message to 400 high school students who were involved in the Governor's School West program. Begun in 1963, this special summer institute, which has served as a model for similar institutions across the United States, promotes contemporary ideas in academics and the performing arts. Participants are drawn from all over the state of North Carolina. Many of the vision statements offered by the Governor's School students were astounding. In one of the statements, an unnamed student wrote, "I lost myself to my senses. It was as though all previous knowledge and experience left me and I felt weightless. It was not being reborn or seeing things for the first time, but opening to my surroundings to such an extent that I became part of them. I did not feel separated from anything or alone because I had no sense of myself." Another student reported, "I am frequently taken over by language and possibility. The sentences come, complex, fully formed. They keep me up at night. My head is loud and busy—I'm thrilled but scared some of the words will slip away."

Even offerings recounting experiences only tangential to Dill's interests evoked her central theme of a sense of wonder. Another unnamed student wrote, "A powerful vision of music as a means of therapy emerged after visiting a loved one in a rest home facility. As a means of giving back to the community, playing the violin for the infirmary arouses emotions of peacefulness and fulfillment. Touching one's life through



a loving musical atmosphere is a vision worth much more than getting paid.”

Weaving together phrases from the Governor’s School students’ stories, Dill directed a performance at nearby Salem College. Following a series of call-and-response sessions with the students, she divided the audience into four segments—each with their own word phrases, rhythm, and timing—and choreographed it all together. The basic text for the performance included the following phrases:

The room is on fire
The air is like a drink
My insides melt into liquid light
I hear a voice
She tells me her secrets
Am I really here?
The world has stopped-taken a breath
(He looks crazy everywhere but his eyes)
She looks crazy everywhere but her eyes
I’m drowning in light
I fall to the ground

The students’ enthusiasm for this performance marked a turning point in the project. The first several presentations had been sparsely attended, but after this performance, the word got out. Dill used the resulting vision statements to inform a new body of works of art. She also used the collected stories to create the billboards, and provide lyrics for the songs sung by the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir. Every discussion, presentation, phone call, fax, and venue contributed to the fabric of the whole project. Single acts and interactions multiplied over the course of the residency in an expanding network of social architecture. For Dill, the artistic act was connecting the interactions between the expanding community and herself, weaving the loose threads of mysticism into an overall fabric that changed shape, contours, size, and direction.

To create the billboard component of the project, the museum partnered with photographer Jackson Smith, and Sherri Lutz and Tom Poe of Fairways Outdoor Advertising. After sketching her ideas, Dill directed a photo-shoot in one of SECCA’s public spaces using models of different ages, races, and genders, some of whom had played important roles in the project. Back in her studio, Dill worked and reworked those photographs, selecting images to be scanned into Poe’s computer. Poe and Dill then designed the billboards in a collaborative effort. In *My Name Was Called*, an open-mouthed, well-dressed man spews forth both language and image into an airy void. In a smeared hand-stamped fashion, the text (“My Name was Called, In Darkness I See”) floats above and below a raining cascade of open eyes. The text evokes what Dill calls “a quiet path of inner spirituality, opening life to possibility.”

In *I Have Left My Body Twice*, another billboard work, Dill visually articulates a rather realistic portrayal of an out-of-body experience, making it seem normal and matter-of-fact. The work shows a young woman spinning controllably through space, as if she has the power to direct her destination. In a related bannerlike work created for the exhibition, Dill depicts twin sets of two women, one standing behind the other (who is sitting) on either side of the banner, guarding the bannerlike dignified centurions. The women are dressed in black, and from their solemn faces hang long black veils. The text reads: “I was born with a veil. When I see visions, I always tell somebody. They are my witness.” Floating in the top right-hand corner is another woman, matronly in nature. The banner is based on the story of one of Dill’s sources who was indeed born with a veil, a thin membrane of skin that stretched across the face. This is sometimes referred to as a “caul,” a portion of the membrane that surrounds a fetus and sometimes covers the head at birth. In some segments of our culture, infants born with cauls are specially regarded as being gifted with “second sight” vision.

In Tampa, Dill’s billboards had been placed at donated sites around the city. In Winston-Salem, however, the four large billboards were positioned strategically along U.S. Highway



52, a major north-south thoroughfare for those traveling through Winston-Salem and the state. The placement of these billboards was ideally suited to this project. Highway 52 is referred to locally as "the zone," a barrier that physically separates a large segment of the African-American and Hispanic communities from the rest of Winston-Salem.

According to Mel White, Director of African-American Programs for Old Salem, "In the mid-70s, when the construction of the highway began, the building of it damaged the fabric of the African-American community here. Many historical landmarks and parts of two predominately African-American cemeteries were demolished. And now, those neighborhoods tend to be avoided as most people travel the main highway." Placement of the billboards on Highway 52 thus symbolized Dill's intent to bridge all aspects of the community, regardless of age, gender, race, or social status.

During the sixteen months of her residency, Dill made numerous visits to the Winston-Salem area. In her initial research, she discovered that the Moravians, some of the earliest settlers of this area, had long encouraged expressive "shouting" in their religious ceremonies. As historian and author Ann Taves explains, "Shouting is an interactive act" involving "weeping, crying out, falling to the ground, and shouting for joy. ... Shouters presuppose a bodily knowledge, derived from the African performance tradition, which insisted that the presence and power of God (Spirit) was most fully realized in the dynamic interaction of the group." In the United States, the Moravians shared the tradition of shouting with many other religious groups (such as the Shouting Methodists or the Separate Baptists). The earliest known records of this type of activity in the United States date back to the interracial revivals and camp meetings held in various regions in Virginia and the Carolinas in the late 1700s.

It was Dill's fascination with this bit of history that led her to Emmanuel Baptist Church and Reverend John Mendez, who was to become Dill's friend and mentor. Mendez is the man featured on the *My Name Was Called* billboard. Guided by

Mendez, the congregation of Emmanuel Baptist Church opened their hearts to Dill. Never judging her intentions, they offered consistent praise and support. Their belief in the wonders of the spirit through its many manifestations resonated with Dill's investigation of the relationships between mysticism and spirituality, tolerance and individuality.

Collaborating with Emmanuel's Spiritual Choir, Dill expanded the spiritual choir's repertoire by writing new lyrics derived from the collected visionary stories. The history of the *a cappella* call-and-response choir and Dill's involvement with it became the subject of a documentary film by Steven Jones and students from the North Carolina School of the Arts, School of Filmmaking. The essay by Terri Dowell-Dennis in this catalogue describes the special interaction between Dill and the choir.

Although this call-and-response singing seems to be fading from favor, the heartfelt songs sung in this tradition marry the rhythm of the syncopated beat with stories and texts rooted in the history of oppression. In the slave fields of the South, where they originated, these songs were full of hidden meaning and hope. The songs were used to lift the spirits high and help the singers persevere.

When the choir sings today, using hand claps and foot tapping as their source of percussion, that history still has a voice, a voice that struck Dill firmly in the gut. In planning the *Tongues on Fire* opening night Spiritual Sing, Dill wanted that same physical-gut sensation to occur in those who participated in the event. According to Dill, "What's wonderful, and perhaps historical, is that the spiritual choir will be singing into being the visions of an entire cross section of the Winston-Salem community. So this African-American tradition is folding into itself this language, and making it live through sacred song."

The use of language through its poetic, visual and physical manifestations has been paramount in informing Dill's work over the last decade. As Nancy Princenthal explains in her essay, Dill has always taken as her inspiration images from



visionary poetry. Speaking to this, Dill explains, "I try to intermingle the image and the language so that the experience and the explanation are at the same time wedded and contrary. For me, the images usually rise up urgently and fully formed. They are like spontaneous, unasked for, visions in response to language and human beings."

Dill believes that when we are born, our bodies are filled with all of the words that we will ever use, and that as we get older, we get lighter and filled with light. In her work *Dot Girls*, we witness this outpouring effect. *Dot Girls* is an ephemeral work where bodies tend to disintegrate. It was inspired by the vision statement, "I had a dream I melted into nothingness." In *Dot Girls*, hundreds of small circular bits of ink-stained paper emanate outward from the center of what appears to be two figures made of the same material, often sharing some of the same particles. This drifting, parting of the body into molecular specks, refers to the glorious feelings of emotional and physical dissolve one enjoys in ecstatic moments.

Dill is particularly interested in exploring how a culture's religious practices and beliefs are wedded to their linguistic and oral traditions. In her sculpture *Hindi Girl with Kafka*, for example, Dill has cast three floating clothed figures without any outer extremities—except for legs and feet extending from the middle figure. The figures are literally covered with words, for their clothing is made of layers of pages from a Hindi newspaper emblazoned with a quotation from Kafka: "Felt as if the way were opened to the unknown nourishment." Dill explains, "We are all clothed in words. It refers here to what do you read, what do you see, and what do you hear?" Like a floating form of the multi-figured Indian deity Shiva, the three figures also represent the many sides of one person—public, private, and sacred.

For the work *Word Fall*, Dill worked with associate professor of art Kim Varnedoe and a group of art students from Salem College, a traditionally all-women's school in Winston-Salem. *Word Fall* is an elaboration of Dill's 1991 work *The White Wall of Wonder*, created in India with the assistance of seven Indian women who painstakingly hand-cut long panels of cloth into

a waterfall of words. In *Word Fall*, over 200 long strands of hand-cut words flow to the ground, weighted by gravity. These curled strands of paper slightly conceal the letters, then the words: *ecstasy*, *visions*, *radiance*, *pull*, *blood*. Like the reciting of a mantra, the soothing repetitive flow of the words generates new meaning each time they are seen. "The power of language to affect as private murmur is so varied and complex. I find I often use the same language over and over again, and for me, it always seems to mean something different, and something is learned. Something is learned in relation to emotion and words and objects," says Dill.

In the sculpture *I Was Born with a Veil*, Dill duplicates the title of one of her large banner-like panels yet incorporates different materials to tell another story. Three small busts cast from the artists' body float on the wall. Ink-stained paper leaves fall from the face, each stamped with a word from the title. The leaves might be those mentioned in Dill's vision—her veil, if you will.

Dill has always been body conscious, keenly aware of how we perceive our bodies, how we treat them, and how we hide from them. Art historian and performance artist Joanna Frueh points out that "body consciousness comes from thinking about the body as a base of knowledge and using it as such." But Dill blends her knowledge of the body with the power and communicative qualities of words. She perceives words as the body's armor, its clothing, our protector. At times she paints words directly on the naked form, making us privy to the body's interior, its essence. Sometimes she licks the words off, perhaps as a form of release or erasure.

Besides the eyes, our hands are one of the most expressive parts of our bodies. Among other things, we talk with our hands; use them to write, type, point, caress, and fight. Physically, they connect us to other people. Hand imagery is a recurring theme in Dill's work. In *It Is the Return of Desire*, a small, pointing cast hand sits high on the wall. The hand's pointing finger is elongated and covered with a roll of bright red words that fall to the ground. Much like the whisper of a



secret, the words, upon close inspection, reveal the title. In *Poem Gloves (He Fumbles at Your Soul)*, a pair of gloves point down, pulled by the weight of the words that exit the fingertips. Seen through the sheerness of the material, words also line the interior of the gloves. The dangling words hang like prayer beads or fields of energy.

Language is the body's way of releasing thoughts and words into the world for others to grasp, and respond to. Sound is the force by which this language is released, be it whisper, blabber, or joyous song. In *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*, Dill harnesses all of these elements to celebrate some simple acts that connect us all. The words, language, and images she chooses were provided by hundreds of collaborators who offered Dill the opportunity to share life's moments of little bliss and splendid rapture.

Dill's project suggests larger issues: the question of contemporary art's role in spiritualism; the differences between the spiritual world of organized religion and the mystical revelations of the individual; how language affects perception, to name a few, but these are for others to tackle. In the end, *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* is but one bridge, one moment in time where we set aside our differences and forge a common bond.

David J. Brown
Senior Curator

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art



Singing Forth the Spirit

SECCA's *Artist and the Community* project with Lesley Dill has truly been a spiritual journey. Over a period of sixteen months the artist, museum staff, and community members have traveled a path illuminated by faith, sharing openly and trusting in the beauty and integrity of Dill's vision.

I first met Lesley Dill in January 2000. She had come to Winston-Salem to test the viability of an idea: She wished to create a community-based project that would encompass people of diverse ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds, unifying them through the language of visionary experience. The project's title would be *Tongues on Fire*.

"I suppose those of us involved in the arts are all visionaries to a degree," Dill says. "We see, apprehend, something inside our minds. And instead of just letting it be, we mediate these ideas into the world in tangible form. It is these fruits of interior visualization, poetry and art, and their relationship to each other, that has driven and inspired my work for some time.... It's the language of visions—be it in dreams or unusual sensory experiences, spontaneous vocalizations, or uncontrolled bodily movements—that I'm interested in investigating in the community of Winston-Salem.... I would like to have people tell me their stories."

Dill and the SECCA staff set out to gather stories about the deeply personal, life-changing, often baffling experiences that define a plane of human existence that is frequently ignored or at best misunderstood. We conducted numerous gatherings with community groups, one of which took place in April 2000 at a local women's center with a group of ministers called the Interfaith Partnership for Advocacy and Reconciliation. At this session Dill asked where she might find a church where people would be willing to talk with her about visionary experience.

Dill's query led us to Emmanuel Baptist Church and the Reverend John Mendez, a powerful spiritual leader, activist, and seer. Part Apache, part Yoruba, Mendez is an African-American man of learning and presence who irrevocably altered our understanding of Christianity. At Emmanuel Baptist Church, Dill found a spiritual "home" on Palm Sunday 2000.

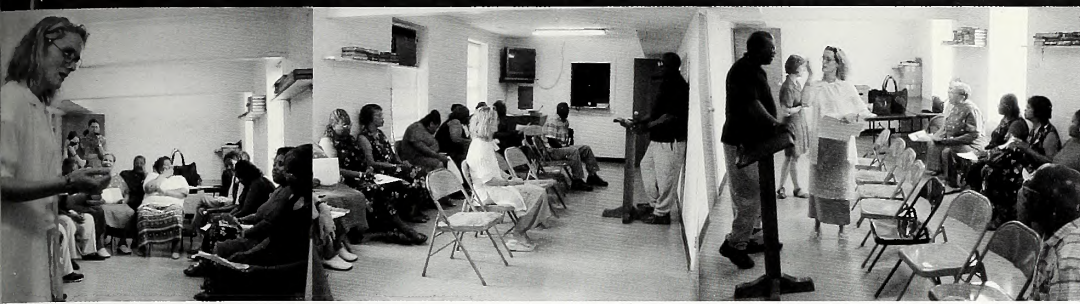
No language can convey the experience of being present when the Holy Spirit moves through a group of people enraptured by song, possessed by a rhythmic syncopation drawn from down deep in the body, manifested in foot stomping, hand clapping, shouting, and crying out in praise. "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you ..."

Like many African-American churches, Emmanuel Baptist Church is open to the movement of the spirit. The congregation respects and reveres the mystical events in our everyday lives that often go unexplained. Reverend Mendez has remarked, "Our people are very mystical. They believe in signs and look for signs before they do anything."

Emmanuel is the home of one of the few remaining spiritual choirs in the United States. These choirs practice an ancestral *a cappella* style of call-and-response singing known in the American South since the days of slavery. The tradition of spiritual choirs can be traced to slaves of Gullah descent who arrived on this continent from Sierra Leone, West Africa, as captives destined to work on South Carolina rice plantations.¹ The songs are passionate, rhythmic evocations of the Holy Spirit, which moves through the congregation and embodies itself in those who are receptive to its gifts.

The Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir sings the old songs in the old style, usually in short meter, but sometimes in long meter, which is exquisitely long, patient, and slow. Reverend Mendez says of the long meter, "It will move you. There is a mystical element in that long meter that has a power. ... It moves a congregation like nothing else can."² The songs transport the listener (though one is never just a listener) back in time and to another plane, creating a sacred time and space within the confines of the house of worship.

The power of the African-American song tradition has become a topic of great interest to scholars in recent years, a belated acknowledgment of the way African culture has shaped certain facets of Christianity. In his essay "Slave Songs and Slave Consciousness, An Exploration in Neglected Sources," Lawrence W. Levine describes Clifton Furness's visit to a prayer meeting held in an old slave cabin on a South Carolina



plantation in 1926: "Gradually moaning became audible in the shadowy corners where the women sat. Some patted their babes in time to the flow of the words, and began swaying backward and forward. Several men moved their feet alternately in strange syncopation. A rhythm was born. . . . It seemed to take shape almost visibly, and grow, I was gripped with a feeling of mass intelligence, a self-conscious entity, gradually informing the crowd and taking possession of every mind there, including my own."³

Levine also describes instances when people of African descent, slaves or descendants of slaves, spontaneously created songs, both sacred and secular, that mirrored their life experiences, hardships, and shared beliefs. Such songs are squarely in the context of the African tradition of improvisation. According to Eileen Southern in *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, many slave songs are variations on already existing tunes that can be traced back to the African continent.⁴

Two fine films, *Family Across the Sea* and *The Language You Cry In*, document the linguistic and musical link between Sierra Leone and the Gullah tradition of coastal South Carolina and Georgia. In *The Language You Cry In*, Lorenzo Turner, an African-American linguist, discovers a five-line song sung by a woman named Amelia Dawley in a remote Georgia fishing village. Ms. Dawley does not know the meaning of the syllables she sings, but a young Sierra Leonean graduate student recognizes them as his native tongue, Mende. A team of scholars including Dr. Joseph Opala, an anthropologist; Cynthia Schmidt, and ethnomusicologist; and Tazieff Koroma, a Sierra Leonean linguist, are able to connect Amelia Dawley's song, which had become a plantation-era children's rhyme, with a Sierra Leonean dirge for a graveside ceremony called teijami or "crossing the river."⁵

Although many of the early slave songs were born of pain and adversity, the people who shared them regarded them as beacons of hope. Deacon Sammie Torbit, who leads the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir, says that the songs were God's way of carrying people through long, difficult

workdays. Torbit grew up in Chester, South Carolina, working in the cotton fields with his parents, who sharecropped. He says, "Those songs would give you hope to get through the day because back then you didn't have much hope. You would just work from sunup to sundown." Torbit cites the words of one of his favorite songs:

*In the heat of the day
I'm gonna bear my burden
In the heat of the day.*

In the days before emancipation, when slaves could rarely gather, song provided a means of communication. The words of the songs often had one meaning to the singers and another to the overseer. This song, which Torbit remembers from his childhood, is an example of how slaves conveyed a covert message of escape:

*I'm going down to the river
Gonna fix my soul in the sand
Gonna shout my troubles over
I've made it to the Promised Land.⁶*

Today there are far more songs forgotten than remembered, but Emmanuel's Spiritual Choir, composed of congregation elders, is committed to keeping the memory of the old songs alive. The choir has an old, black-bound hymnal, published in 1920, that Deacon Torbit saved from his youth. At the juncture of the Twenty-First Century, Torbit and his spiritual choir are more interested in preserving the old songs than in creating new ones.

As part of her *Artist and the Community* project, however, Lesley Dill urged Emmanuel's Spiritual Choir to use the foundation of the old songs to explore the tradition of spontaneous narrative. Dill invited the choir to create new songs based on excerpts from the language shared with her by nearly 700



people in the Winston-Salem community. At a recent choir rehearsal, members selected a vision poem that Dill had composed and sang it to the tune of an old hymn, "So Glad I'm Here With Jesus Now."

*The night air was quiet and so still
 The night air was quiet and so still
 Alone in my room I felt a chill—
 I heard a voice call my name
 I heard a voice
 Saying, "Feel not ashamed ..."
 And I heard a voice call my name
 I said things that I could not know—
 And I heard a voice calling my name.*

Working with the artist and on their own, the choir coupled the "language of visions" with a variation of its unique style of singing, creating a community experience called *Tongues on Fire: Spiritual Sing* for the opening night of the exhibition.

In its role as keeper and purveyor of cultural objects, the modern museum is generally a secular institution, and in recent years contemporary artists have addressed societal issues much more often than spiritual ones. *Tongues on Fire*, however, has required project participants to trust in something surer and wiser than ourselves. As the project comes to a close, I am struck with a revelation: Throughout the project, our guiding developmental principle has been faith. Faith guided us as we asked community members to share their most intimate moments. Faith guided us as we worked with the spiritual choir and a rich spiritual tradition to give voice to contemporary language. Faith guided us as we brought these new works to the community at large. And faith guided us as we trusted in the power of contemporary art to play a meaningful role in people's lives.

For the past two centuries, African Americans have sung the secret life and language of their people into being through the gift of spontaneous song. Inspired by that rich tradition,

the *Tongues on Fire* project has given voice to what we have come to call "the mysticism of Winston-Salem."

Terri Dowell-Dennis

Curator of Education

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

Notes

1. Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano, producer/director, *The Language You Cry In* (California newsreel, 1998) 52 minutes.
2. North Carolina School of the Arts, School of Filmmaking, unpublished video interview with Lesley Dill, Reverend John Mendez, Sammie Torbit, and Belinda Tate.
3. Lawrence W. Levine, "Slave Songs and Slave Consciousness: An Exploration in Neglected Sources," in *African American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (Routledge, 1997) 65, citing Clifton Joseph Furness, "Communal Music Among Arabians and Negroes," *Musical Quarterly* 16 (January 1930), 49-51.
4. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (W.W. Norton, 1983), 172-77.
5. Toepke and Serrano, *The Language You Cry In*.
6. NCSA, unpublished interview.

Unless otherwise attributed, quotes of the artist are from conversations with the author, spring 2001.



Testimony

My life is full of visions and revelations. My mother, Opal Couthen Tate, and my grandmother, Margaret Robinson Couthen, were powerful spiritual women. By watching them, I learned to connect with God's wisdom, my inner power, and the strength of my ancestors.

During difficult times, my mother and grandmother would darken the house completely, except for a few candles. They got on their knees to pray. They thanked God for every blessing they could recall. They moved through the house touching every object, blessing it, and thanking God for it. Soon the house was filled with the spirit of the Lord. Our souls were comforted, and our faith restored.

Then came the singing. We sang the old spiritual hymns in the long-meter fashion, the same way that Deacon Sammie Torbit and the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir sing them today. Whatever our family needed, came. Despite our limited resources, we lacked for nothing.

Our lives were full of song. While making biscuits or hanging clothes on the line, my grandmother would sing "In the Heat of the Day," "If Anybody Asks You Who I Am," "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," "Jordan River," or "I May Be a Stranger." My grandfather, James Matthew Couthen, favored "These Old Eyes of Mine" and "If You Live Right, Heaven Belongs to You." He lived to be almost 100 years old, after losing his eyesight to glaucoma in his 70s and surviving a massive stroke in his 80s. He too was a man of faith.

Participating in this project has given me an incredible opportunity to honor my ancestors and their collective wisdom. The spiritual hymns they taught me are their testimony. The music that permeated their lives represents the spirituality and strength that they brought to a brutal and callous existence in America.

Tongues on Fire has amplified the voice of my ancestors. It honors their spiritual wisdom and touches us in unexpected and unforgettable ways. As artist/liason, Lesley Dill has not only put the museum in the community, she has brought the spirit of the community into the museum.

Belinda Tate

Director, Diggs Gallery
Winston-Salem State University



Lesley Dill as a Gift of the Spirit

Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy, a project that began with many intellectual, artistic, cultural, and academic components, turned out to be a genuine transcending experience for all involved—especially Lesley Dill. For the Emmanuel Baptist Church family, this project was a confirmation and witness to the spiritual power we sing, pray, and testify about.

For some strange unarticulated reason, when I was first approached about *Tongues on Fire*, I did not raise a defensive antenna of what one scholar refers to as a “hermeneutic of suspicion.” Instead I felt a genuine meeting of the spirits and openness of the hearts. I sensed in Lesley Dill a willingness to search and know the way and workings of the spirit in an African-American context. After we broke bread together following Sunday morning’s worship, I was convinced that Emmanuel Baptist Church should participate in Dill’s community project with SECCA.

At the time I did not suspect the impact this experience would have on Dill and our church. Dill’s involvement was more than an intellectual and cultural quest. It was more than a job. Hers was a real encounter with the holy that exposed her own personal and private spiritual journey. It resulted in her finding a spiritual home, family, and oneness among us. Her vision and activism for oneness and diversity in the world exposed her purity of heart.

For Emmanuel Baptist Church, Lesley has been a gift. Her coming to us encouraged us to examine our own spirituality. She helped us escape the danger of becoming content with what we do, reducing our rituals to mere routine. Our festivals, special days, and worship demonstrate our journey of faith. Our experiences of the tragic and the triumphant on life’s path give us a hope to believe in, a faith to trust in, a song to sing, and a story to tell. African-American spirituality is that power in Black life that “keeps us keeping on” and “inching along” in the face of often difficult times and stiff opposition. Our interaction with Lesley Dill has challenged us

to look at ourselves and know again who we are, whose we are, and what and why we believe what we sing, shout, preach, and testify about.

Finally, *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* has provided us with the opportunity to bear witness publicly—to share our spirituality. The project has given exposure to Deacon Torbit, the spiritual choir, and many other members of our congregation with the spiritual gifts to heal, encourage, bless, and empower. We are grateful to Lesley Dill and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art for allowing the spirit to draw us together in this common bond.

Reverend John Mendez
Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church

Works in the Exhibition

MY NAME WAS



IN DARKNESS



S MALL
C H A N G E
C H A N G E

MY NAME WAS CALLED -

IN DARKNESS I SEE -





SMALL VISIONS CHANGE ME
CHANGE WHO I AM
CHANGE WHO I WANT TO BE

VISIONS CHANGE ME

WHO I AM

WHO I WANT TO BE

I WAS BORN WITH
A
VEIL



WHEN I SEE VISIONS



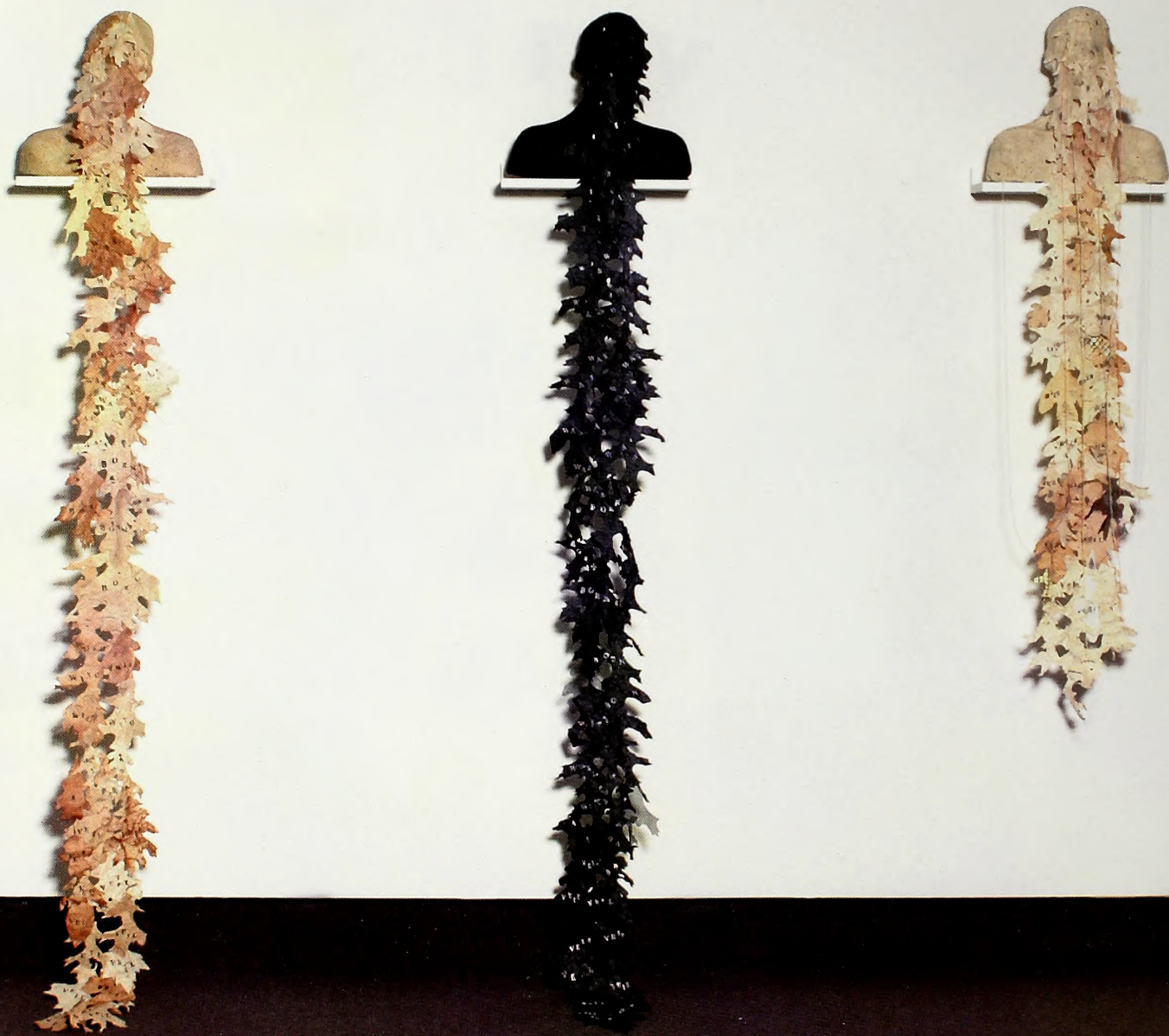
I ALWAYS
TELL
SOMEBODY —



THEY ARE MY
WITNESS

I Was Born With a Veil, 2001

e envisioned some things concerning my family members more than I care to express. Some things have been good and



I Was Born with a Veil, 2001

some have been bad. So would you please allow me not to share at this time? Thank you however for arousing my awareness

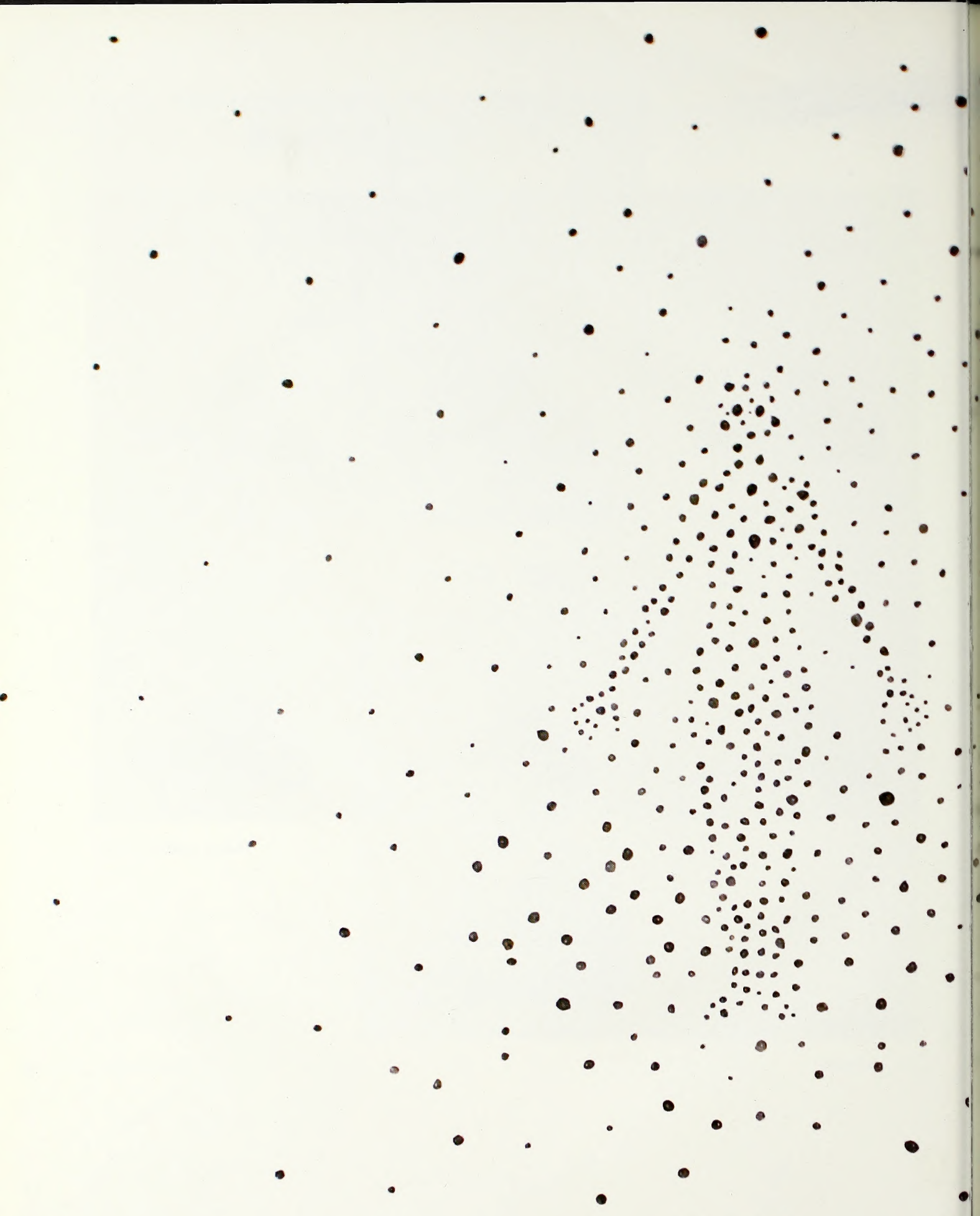


I Heard a Voice, 2001

ift. When I went to this big black church and saw the people of all shades of brown waving, clapping, shouting,

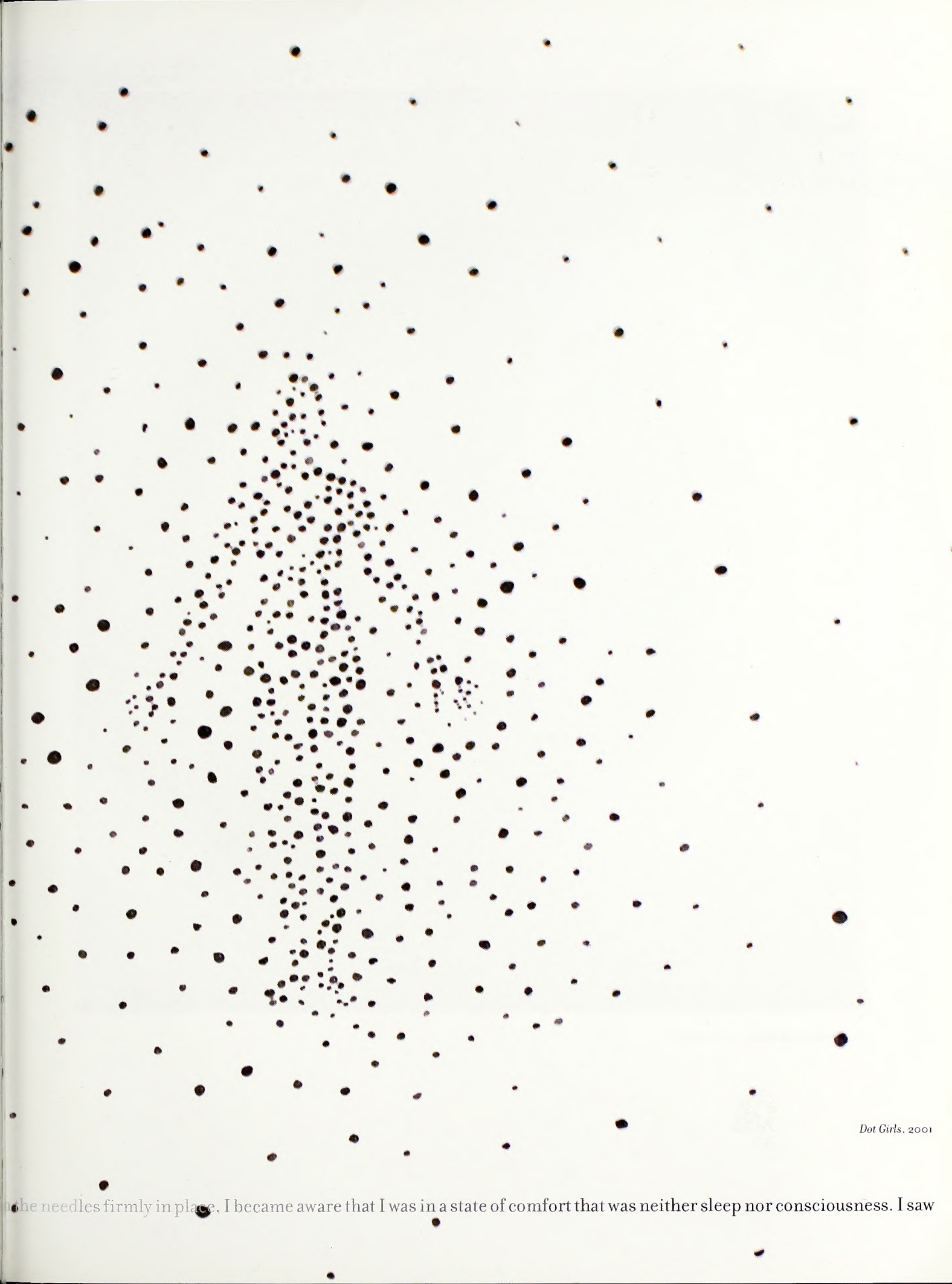


Tongues on Fire, 2001 (detail)



tears.

I visit an acupuncturist once a month. During one visit, I had an experience unlike any I've ever encount

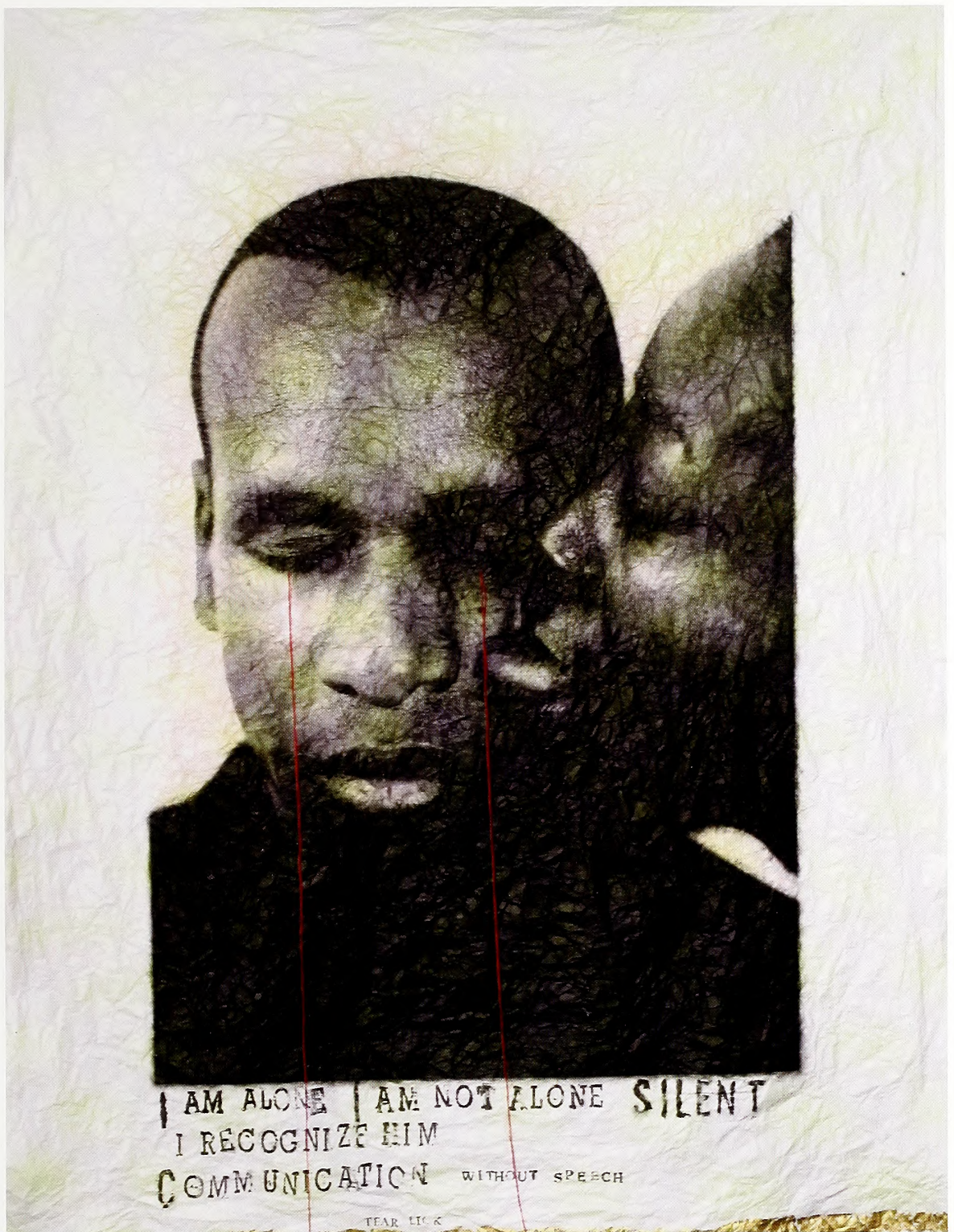


Dot Girls, 2001

the needles firmly in place, I became aware that I was in a state of comfort that was neither sleep nor consciousness. I saw



a flash of white light that began to grow and cover my entire field of vision. After a few seconds of this, I began to feel fr



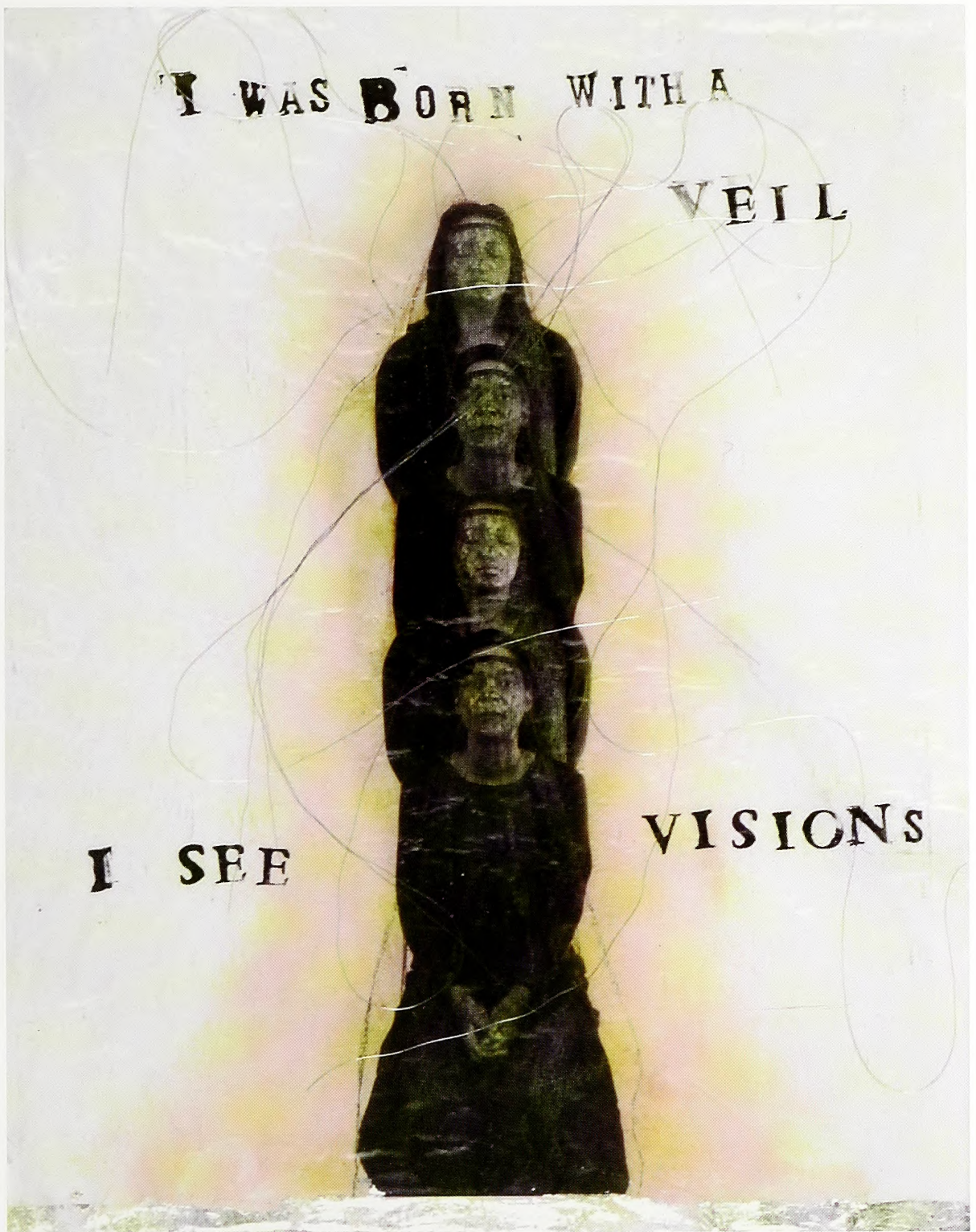
TearLick, 2001 (detail)

d and wondered if I was dying.

I experienced a perfect moment when everything seemed to slow or stop and the



song of all things seemed to be in perfect harmony with the song of my soul. There have been a couple of times when I sat on



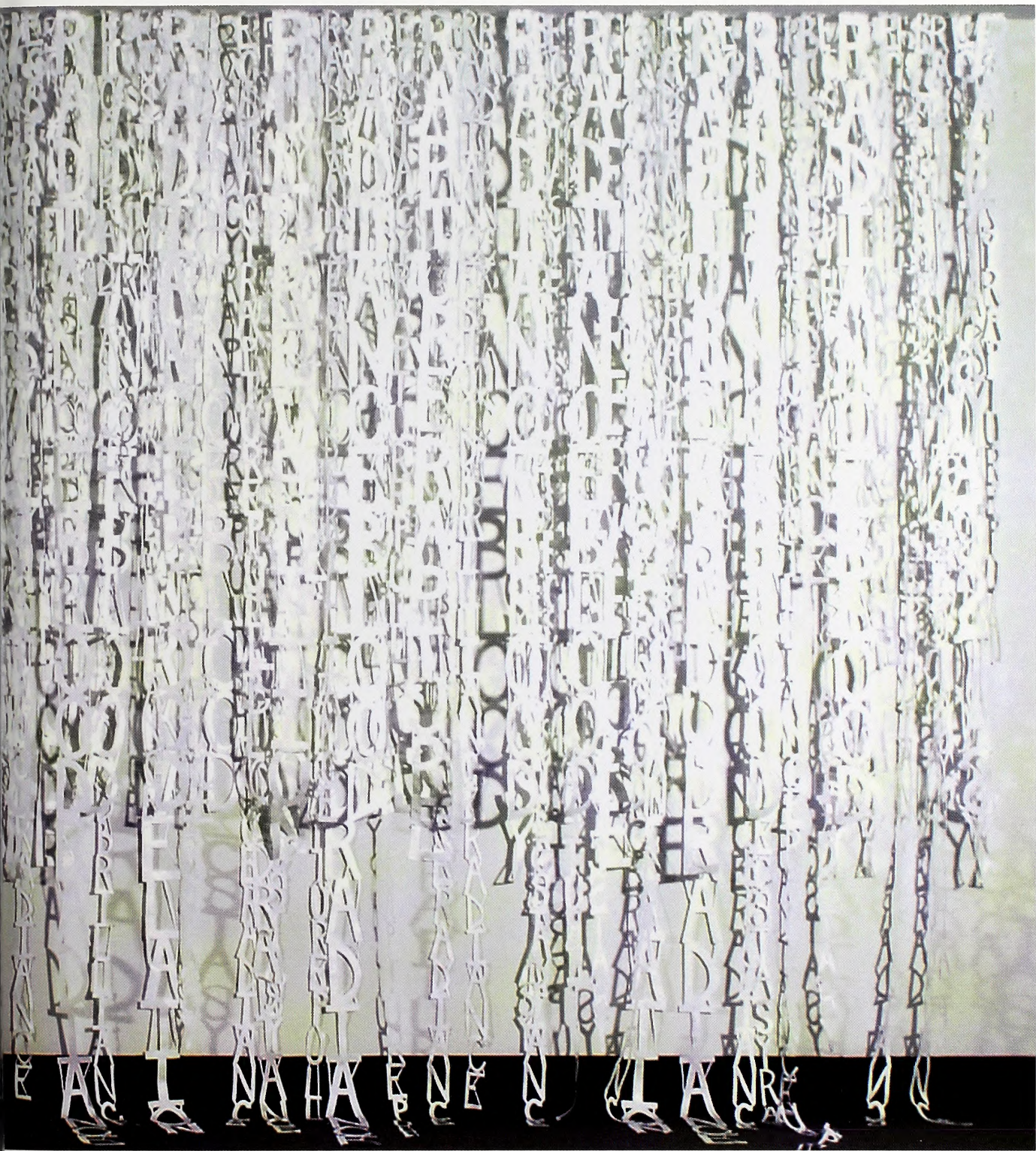
I Was Born with a Veil, 2001

write and the words just flooded in and I barely had time to get them all down before they were forgotten.

I was



diagnosed with three leaky valves in my heart. Not a big problem, but it worried my mom. One day we were at Pizza Villa



Word Fall, 2001

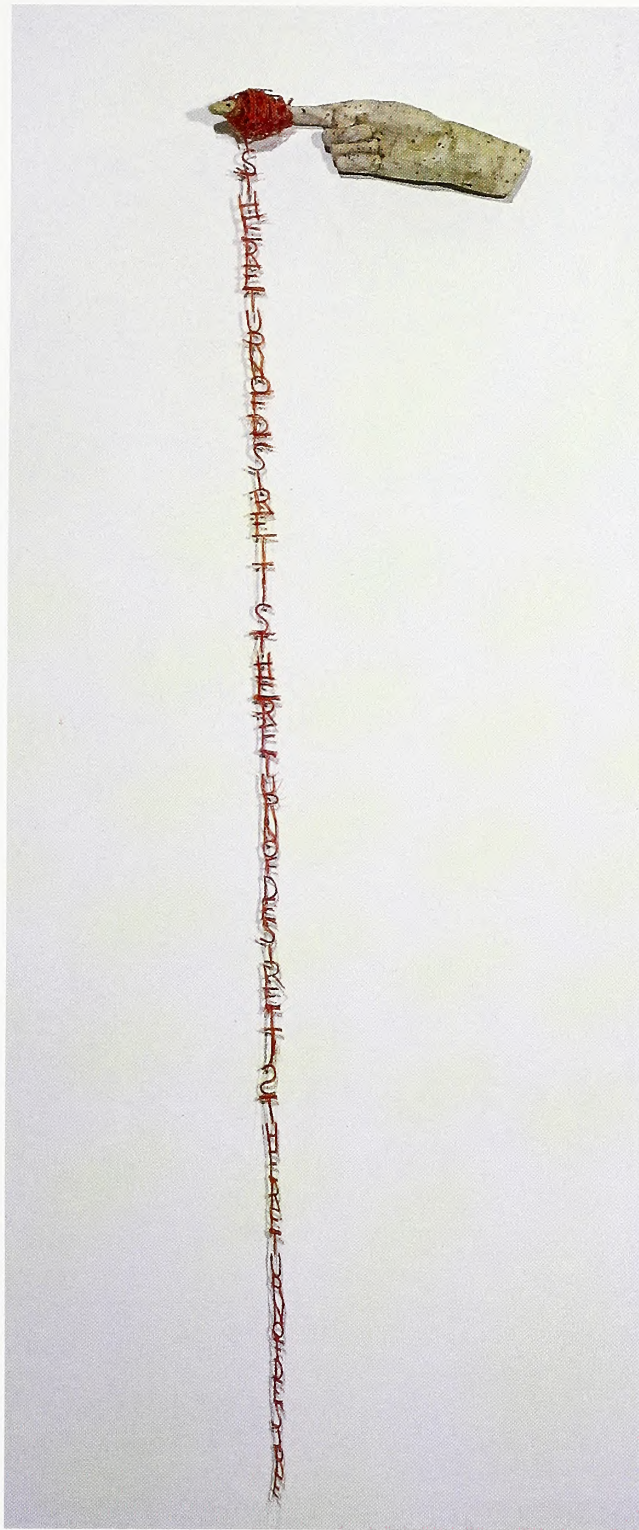
old lady walked up and asked if anyone in our family had heart problems. So my grandma told her about me and she prayed



Poem Gloves (He Fumbles at your Soul), 1992

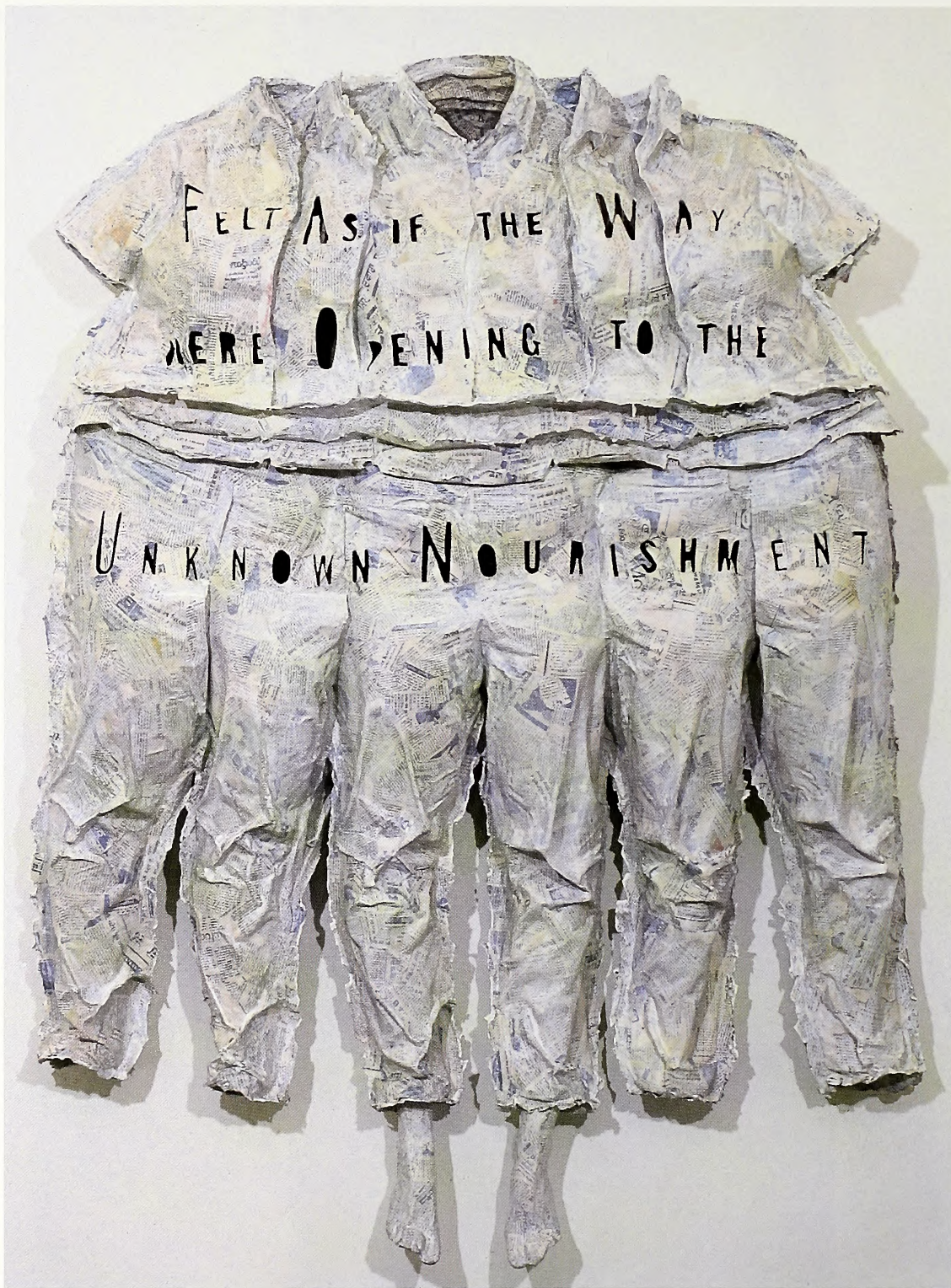
for me. Now only one of my valves leaks.

I've had a repeated dream of getting ready to preach on a Sunday mor

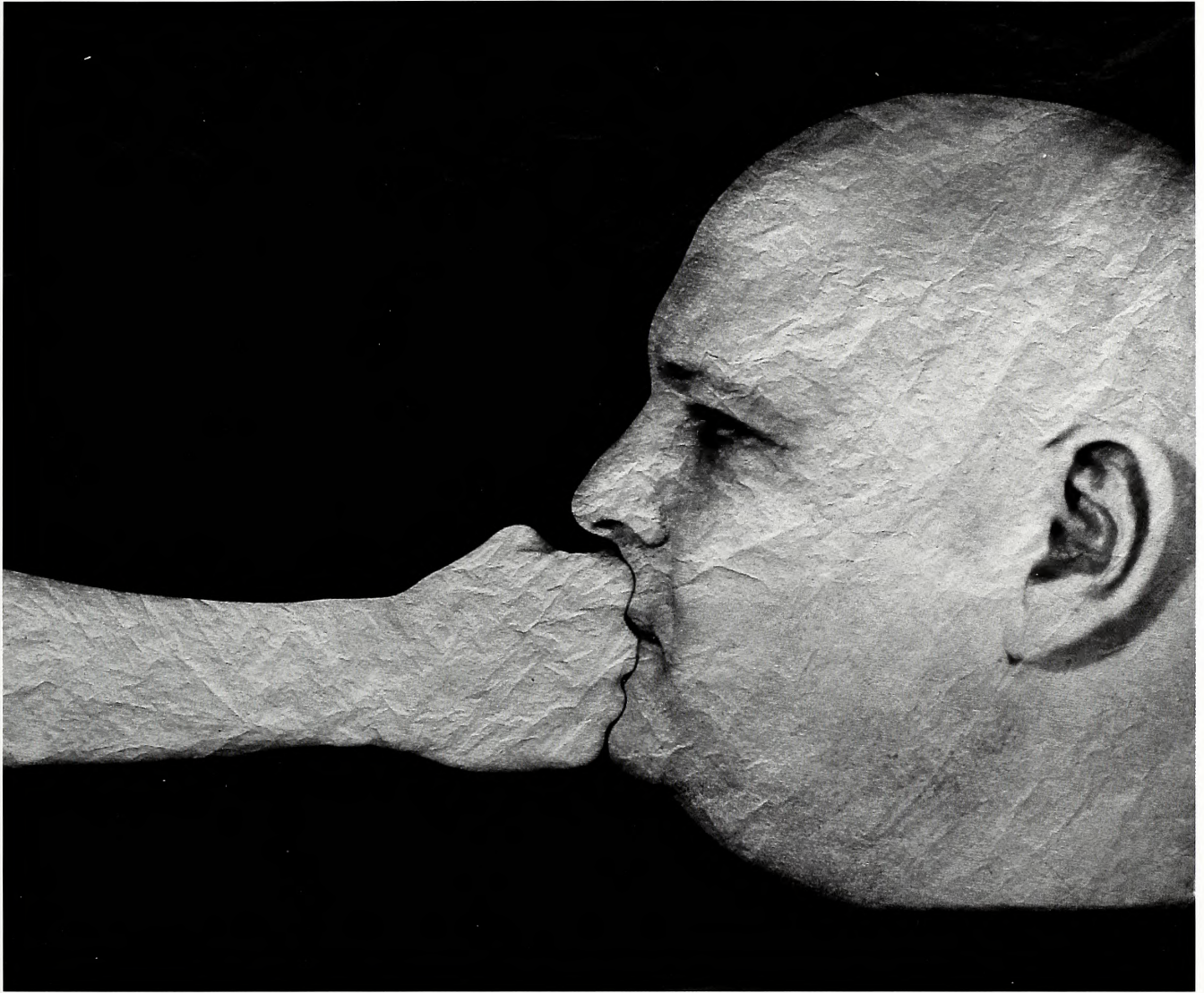


It Is the Return of Desire, 2000

I'm not ready. And I'm getting up to the pulpit and I'm barefooted. I had this vision of me standing there in the pulpit in



Wake Forest and I was naked, and had no shoes on.



He Felt, 2000

E X P E R I E N C E L E

I HAVE LEFT MY BODY

I BEGAN TO SPIN HEAD OVER HEEL

SLOWLY



EXPERIENCE LEFT ME AND I FELT WEIGHTLESS - - -

I HAVE LEFT MY BODY TWICE

I BEGAN TO SPIN HEAD OVER HEELS
SLOWLY



Y TWICE

ELS

LY



I Have Left My Body Twice. 2001

Deep Breathing: Lesley Dill's Language Arts

Of the many ways to vent the human engine—of the many escape routes for what lies inside the body, firing up and down its nervous system and circulating through its veins—the most ordinary, and confounding, is speech. “We are animals of words,” Lesley Dill has said. “If you were to cut us open anywhere, what would come out would not be just blood and organs, but also language.”

For many years Dill has explored, with great precision and sympathy, the intersections of the visual and the verbal. In sculpture, drawings, collages, photographs, and performances, and in work that combines these media, she has examined the body language of words, both oral and written. What concerns her particularly is the knife-edge of the boundary shared by words and images.

In her most recent work, Dill hones the knife still sharper. The center of gravity of *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* is oral language and personal revelation, forms of expression well outside the compass of most visual art. In the words of Emily Dickinson, whose poetry is central to Dill's work, they transcend even the “single screw of flesh that pins the soul.”

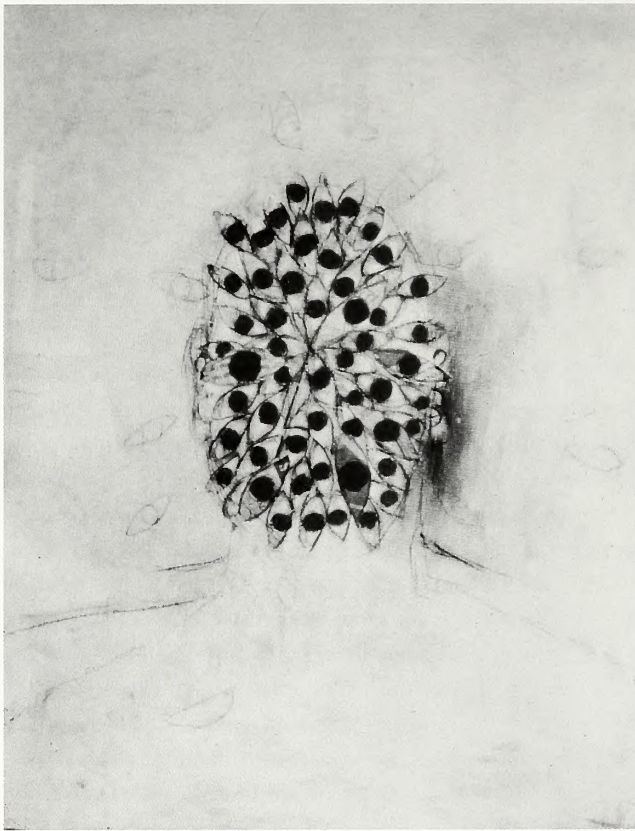
Of course, to say so is to make rather extravagant spiritual claims for Dill's current project, but such claims are not out of proportion to Dill's ambition. *Tongues on Fire* aims squarely at the most inaccessible kinds of mental experience, those that are sometimes described in the terms of traditional religion, and at others in terms of psychology. Her subject, broadly speaking, is language that has no fixed representation, in words or pictures: language in abeyance. But, in one of the many paradoxes Dill's work courts, it also involves a particularly materialized kind of spiritual speech: individual written accounts of rapture, the powerful music of a spiritual choir and gospel song.

When artists use verbal language, their approach is generally through the connective tissue of writing. Whether the lineage of contemporary word-based visual art is traced to

Filippo Marinetti's parole en liberta, or to William Blake's ecstatic fusion of poetry and drawing, or to the soul-seducing riches of medieval manuscript illumination, the critical issue has been the relationship between how words look and what they mean. Vision is accepted as a mediating system, contributing to the construction of verbal significance, and vice versa. This is how Dill's use of language began. It was preceded by work with a tendency toward sensory swarm, as in a couple of pivotal drawings of 1989 that showed human heads clouded with dozens of eyes (an image derived, in part, from Dill's childhood memory of seeing a child surrounded by bees). In subsequent drawings, the eyes—now in more naturalistic, paired configurations—began to spill words, like tears; similarly, words fell from paired hands. Even when she used such sculptural materials as wood, copper, wire, and thread, much of her work cleaved to two dimensions—the graphic and the writerly.

At the same time, Dill began to make three-dimensional work in which language was a kind of skin, a garment and/or shield. *Poem Dress* and *Poem Suit* appeared in 1990, both fashioned from papery material perforated with letters. The words were by Dickinson, whose poetry had that year re-entered Dill's life with the force of a revelation. These were frail, fluttery works; by contrast, Dill's *Hinged Poem Dress* of 1992 is built like a cage. In a statement accompanying a reproduction of this work, Dill quotes Dickinson: “Sometimes I feel skinless,” she wrote, implicitly offering the hinged dress as both testament to her vulnerability, and protection against it.

In 1991 and 1992, Dill spent eighteen months in India, an experience that was pivotal, in part because it immersed her in a culture where spiritual immanence is as ordinary as water. No less important, Dill also found herself living and working within a language she could understand only as sound, and, when written, visual pattern. She soon began to express her deepened understanding of language's physicality in cur-



Seer, 1993, charcoal and gouache on paper, 24 x 17 1/2

tains of words that were as difficult to read as they were resonant with meaning.

By the mid-1990s, Dill began to apply language to living bodies, both by creating poetry-inscribed dresses worn in live performances, and by writing words directly on naked men and women and then photographing them—"tattooing from within," Dill called it. *Speaking Dress*, first performed at the Guggenheim Museum in Soho in 1993, the *Dada Poem Wedding Dress*, first seen in 1994, and *Sometimes I Feel Skinless*, presented with readings by Donna Masini and Tom Sleight at George Adams Gallery in New York in 1995, were all pivotal works. At the same time, a drift toward immateriality, lurking in the very use of written language and its pull against the material surface of things, began to be a focus. Exploring subjects in which the paradox could be vivified, Dill entered into an especially felicitous collaboration with Lawrence Goldhuber, a dancer whose unique combination of corpulence, power, and grace made him the perfect foil for still

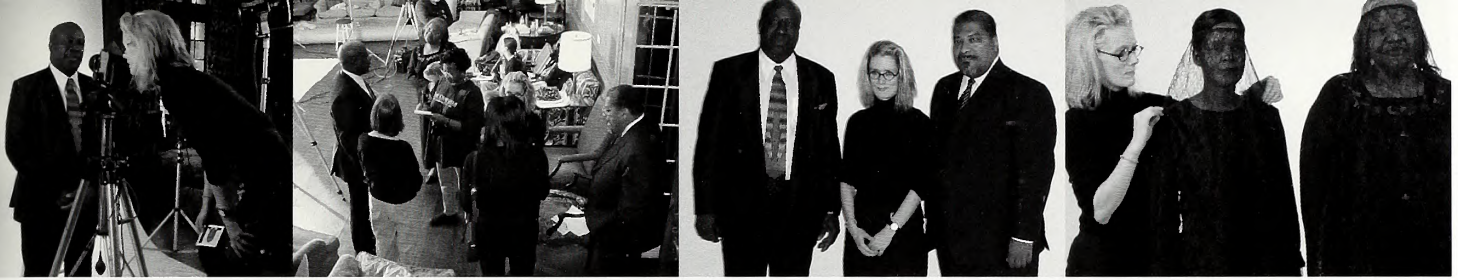


imagery as well as performance. Goldhuber appeared with his frequent dance partner, the slender and petite Heidi Latsky, in two performances to which Dill contributed, and in several striking photo-based works. Dill's 1997 image of Goldhuber seen in profile, with his fist in his mouth, bears the faint inscription, "A Faith like a Guillotine, As Heavy as Light." The same body of work includes an image of a slender naked man seen at a distance, arching his body against a backdrop of equally attenuated trees. The line of verse at the image's bottom margin begins, "I have whittled away my body. ..."

In imagery of increasing ethereality—imagery that includes bodies reduced to networks of veins and nerves, and letters strung like beads—Dill moved toward an ever more explicitly acknowledged interest in transcendence, as a field of inquiry if not a personal or artistic goal. Throughout, Dickinson's poetry remained central, though it was increasingly joined by the words of others (including Rilke, Neruda, and Espriu) who have written, however discreetly, of the most immodest of experiences: ecstasy, rapture, bliss.

Inevitably, Dill became interested in spiritual uses of language, not excluding Judeo-Christian liturgy, though she looked into various sacred languages across cultures and history. Of particular interest is the spiritual and cultural watershed marked by the advent of writing, a subject that has been studied at length by the linguistic historian (and psychiatrist, and Jesuit priest) Walter Ong. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong observes that with the establishment of writing comes the possibility of analytic thought, introspection, a sense of individual will, and a clear understanding of past and future. Writing creates the concept of objectivity, and permits abstraction. Orality, by contrast, assumes a human character that is communal, externalized, eternal.

"Sight isolates, sound incorporates," Ong writes. "You can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound. There is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight. By contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is thus a unifying sense." Similarly, the poet Charles Bernstein observes, "No sooner does the Greek alphabet appear than the 'l' of writing also ap-



pears.”² And, as has been noted by literary critic Alberto Manguel, orality remained central to Western culture long after the introduction of writing. Manguel eloquently describes medieval scriptoria alive with the sound of monks reading their work aloud.³

The immersive condition of oral language, especially as it seeps into literate culture, is greatly important to Dill. In her work as well as in her own reflections on it, she often uses words as if they were mantras, layering them thickly enough that meaning is subordinated to their material presence. “Radiance,” for example, is a word she finds herself “saying to myself a few times a day.” This involvement with language’s sacred usage implies a community of speech. It refers to experiences in which the sense of a bounded self is transcended. And as such, it indicates a central impulse in *Tongues on Fire*.

Dill has long enjoyed collaborating, working with assistants on unique works, with master printers on editioned prints and multiples, and with dancers and musicians on performances. But *Tongues on Fire* is the first time that the work’s content has come, in part, from others. For this project, Dill solicited testimonies from individuals who had had visions—who had been in states that are, first and fundamentally, without words, but were translated into such at Dill’s request. She distributed a questionnaire in churches, schools, libraries, galleries, and various other community centers, asking, among other things, “Have you ever experienced anything that you couldn’t explain? Have you ever felt you’ve lost track of time or had something like a ‘perfect moment’?” The questionnaire also sought accounts of memorable dreams, visions, or inspirations, or feelings of bliss or rapture. It produced nearly 700 responses.

The responses constituted a colossal gift, and a responsibility of equal proportion. Dill chose to absorb the responses into a tripartite body of work involving billboards, unique works on paper, and choral performance. In many ways, the project is a turning point as crucial as her trip to India. Dill says, largely because it is the first that makes explicit the spirituality long latent in her work.

Dill first used billboards in a 1998 project in Tampa, including one that featured these lines from Emily Dickinson: “I think to live may be bliss / To those who dare to try / Beyond my limit to conceive / My lip to testify.” While also addressed to liminal experience, the *Tongues on Fire* billboard texts, based on collected vision stories, are, in some ways, less elliptical, and more urgent. “Small Visions Change Me / Change Who I Am / Change Who I Want To Be,” says one that shows a woman with a back-tilted head, the word “ecstasy” coming out of each eye. “I Have Left My Body Twice / I Began To Spin Head Over Heels Slowly” accompanies an image of a young woman in happy fetal transport. The billboard with the words “My Name Was Called / In Darkness I See” features the Reverend John Mendez, pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, with a cloud of eyes issuing from his mouth. “Experience Left Me and I Felt Weightless” shows a pair of floating feet and the hem of a dress. And, as an introduction to the exhibition, there is an image of a quartet of women and these words, “I was born with a Veil”—a reference to being born with second sight. Dill has said that these words are the project’s theme song.

While the billboards are a very public form of address and require relatively broad language, the unique works on paper Dill produced in connection with *Tongues on Fire* are nuanced to the brink of imperceptibility. Working with the kind of paper used for FedEx® bags—light, wrinkle-prone, and durable as silk—Dill combined fragments of testimony (“I had a dream that I melted into nothingness,” for instance) with images of great delicacy.

At the same time, *Tongues on Fire* involved working with the community in a very public undertaking. To this aspect of the project, Dill brought a degree of sympathy and willingness to overcome self-consciousness that is sorely lacking in the cliché-ridden domain of community-oriented contemporary art. Following much discussion, the Spiritual Choir of Emmanuel Baptist Church, under the direction of Deacon Sammie Torbit, agreed to sing a cycle of “Vision Songs” that incorporated fragments of the accounts Dill collected for this project.



A remarkable group of church members whose singing is related to, but not identical with, traditional gospel music, the Emanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir practices a kind of vocalization that is visceral. As Dill has pointed out, in gospel singing the "voices are above the words, and in the spiritual choir, the voices are below the words." The elusive tenor of the choir's music is characteristic of *Tongues on Fire*, which Dill says is greatly concerned with the mercurial character of pitch, whether of a voice, a persona, or a mode of expression.

Similarly, talking about the symbolic quality of fire, Dill notes that it "can be profane, and pure," that it both cleanses and consumes. Like blood, another current motif in her work, fire is associated with violence and also with vitality, and is measured more by its energy than position or mass—which is also true, to some extent, of *Tongues on Fire*. In its manifold exchanges between song and image, private recollection and public expression, *Tongues on Fire* achieved a degree of interdisciplinary energy very close to white heat.

Dill's deep immersion in this project provoked her, unexpectedly, to revisit a vision she had herself, when she was a young teenager. Occasioned by looking at leaves through a window, Dill's experience involved a sudden, vivid, and immediate understanding of the world, metaphysical and cosmological in scope.⁴ Dill's vision holds the seeds of her attraction to "dark radiance, dark luminosity, as of leaves against the sky at twilight." Imbedded in it, too, is her fascination with the "meaning withheld from language"—and, by extension, with the resonance audible even in the most unyielding silence.

To artists of Dill's generation, silence was first of all a discipline, a form of rigor usually manifest as minimalism. Susan Sontag was nearly alone at the time in recognizing the connection of its principles to mystical traditions, and to deep frustration with the mediacy of most art. "Art must mount a full scale attack on language itself, by means of language and its surrogates, on behalf of the standard of silence," Sontag wrote in 1967. "The efficacious artwork leaves silence in its wake."⁵ And so, rhapsodically, does Dill's current work. In part, this is a matter of bringing out the silence that is the

medium for all song, a silence full to bursting.

"Sumptuous destitution is a phrase scholars use of female silence," writes Anne Carson in a poem that alternates segments of this line with epistolary fragments from Emily Dickinson. And, in another poem, she says, "To get the sound take everything that is not the sound drop it / Down a well, listen. / Then drop the sound. Listen to the difference / Shatter." Both are fair descriptions of Dill's work.

But silence is also the condition of any absorbing manual labor, always a lodestone for Dill and a refuge of particular importance in the wake of social commitments as demanding as those of *Tongues on Fire*. Eyes and hands have long had a kind of reciprocity in Dill's imagery, and in her most recent work, words flow and sprout and flame from fingertips with particular vigor (as well, of course, as from the mouth). In *Radiance Blood*, for example, a modest paper hand positively detonates with words. "The fingertips have been cut to release the words out into the air like smoke. I think that speech is given out of our mouths and off our flesh as a kind of radiance," Dill says of this work, invoking in a single statement (and not here alone) a remarkably broad understanding of what vision can mean in contemporary art.

Nancy Princenthal

Notes

1. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), 72.
2. Charles Bernstein, "The Art of Immemorability," in *A Book of the Book* (New York: Granary Books, 2000), 509.
3. Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 47 ff.
4. Tom Patterson, *Winston Salem Journal*, July 2, 2000.
5. Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976), 23.

Works in the Exhibition

Tongues on Fire, 2001

photo silk screen, ink, oil, thread, silver leaf, wax on paper
9 panels, 58 x 50 x 1/4 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

I Was Born with a Veil, 2001

chiri paper, cloth, ink, thread
3 heads/wall texts: 62-74 x 17 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Clap Revelation, 2001

photo silk screen, ink, oil, acrylic, thread, gold leaf, silver leaf, wax on paper
9 panels: 58 x 50 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

I Lost Myself to My Senses, 2001

photo silk screen on ink-stained paper
2 panels: gold; 58 1/2 x 50 inches; black, 58 x 50 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

TearLick, 2001

photo silk screen, ink, oil, thread, gold leaf, wax on paper
2 panels: 65 x 50 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

I Have Left My Body Twice, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
126 x 432 inches
Courtesy of the artist

My Name was Called, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
126 x 432 inches
Courtesy of the artist

I Was Born With a Veil, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
180 x 126 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Word Fall, 2001

cut paper text
(made in collaboration with Kim Varnedoe, and students from Salem College and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro)
size variable
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

I Heard a Voice, 2001

chiri paper, paper, thread, ink
130 x 111 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Dot Girls, 2001

ink-stained paper
120 x 240 inches, size variable
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Vision Language, 2001

ink-stained paper
number and dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

I Was Born with a Veil, 2001

photo collage, ink, thread, silver leaf on paper
14 x 11 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Singing Light, 2001

photo collage, ink, thread, silver leaf on paper
11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Ecstasy, 2001

photo collage, ink, thread, silver leaf on paper
11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Spiritual Sing, 2001

documentary film
Courtesy of the North Carolina School of the Arts, School of Filmmaking (special thanks to Steven Jones)

He Felt, 2000

oil, thread, wax on photo
49 1/4 x 77 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

It Is the Return of Desire, 2000

chiri paper, thread, glue
51 x 9 7/8 x 2 inches
Private collection

Hindi Girl with Kafka, 2000

laminated newsprint, wax, glue
76 x 52 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York

Poem Cloves (He Fumbles at your Soul), 1992

thread, cloth, rice paper
45 x 12 inches
Private collection

People's Stories, Tongues on Fire

booklets
Courtesy of the community of Winston-Salem

In Winston-Salem, four billboards were installed on U.S. Highway 52:

Experience Left Me, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
168 x 576 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Small Visions Change Me, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
126 x 432 inches
Courtesy of the artist

My Name Was Called, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
168 x 576 inches
Courtesy of the artist

I Have Left my Body Twice, 2001

ink jet on vinyl
168 x 576 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Lesley Dill

Born in Bronxville, New York, 1950

Lives in New York City

Education

Maryland Institute of Art, Baltimore, M.F.A., 1980

Smith College, Northampton, M.A.T., 1974

Trinity College, Hartford, B.A., 1972

Awards and Grants

Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant, 1996

New York Foundation for the Arts, Drawing-Printmaking Category, 1995

Project Residency Award, Hillwood Art Museum and New York State Council on Arts, 1992

National Endowment for the Arts, Sculpture Fellowship, 1990

Artist-in-Residence, Altos de Chavon, Dominican Republic, 1984

Zaner Corporation Purchase Award from Small Works '83, 1983

Selected Solo Exhibitions

Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy. Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. 2001. * (Traveling nationally to other venues through 2003.)

Lesley Dill. Harrisburg Area Community College Art Gallery, Pennsylvania. 2001.

Lesley Dill—New Sculpture. George Adams Gallery, New York. 2000.

Lesley Dill: Word and Image. Suzanne H. Arnold Art Gallery, Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Pennsylvania. 2000.*

Lesley Dill—Tilt. Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans. 2000.

These Saw Visions: Billboards by Lesley Dill. Organized by Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. January–February 2000.

Lesley Dill—New Works. Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston. November 1999.

Lesley Dill. Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis. October 1999.

New Cast Works. Byron Cohen Gallery, Kansas City. March 1999.

Work in Progress: Lesley Dill. Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi. 1999.

Lesley Dill: The Poetics of Form. Widener Gallery, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut; Portland Art Museum, Maine; List Gallery, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania; Selby Gallery, Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, Florida. 1998–99.*

Lesley Dill: A Secret Told... George Adams Gallery, New York. October 1998.

I Reach along the Cord of Speech. Quartet Editions, New York. 1998.

These Saw Visions... University of West Florida Art Gallery, Pensacola. 1998.

Two-person exhibition (with Sudarshan Shetty). Nature Morte Gallery, New Delhi, India. 1998.

Lesley Dill. Locus Gallery, St. Louis. 1998.

Lesley Dill. Galeria Thomas Cohn, Sao Paulo, Brazil. 1997.*

Language and Desire. Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia. 1997.

Lesley Dill: In Black and White. George Adams Gallery, New York. 1997.*

Lesley Dill: A Mouth Full of Words. Art Museum, University of Memphis, Tennessee. 1997.*

Banners and Figurative Sculpture. Susan Cummins Gallery, Mill Valley, California. 1996.

Installation and Performance. Creteil Maison des Arts. 1996.

Voices in the Air. Cohen Berkowitz Gallery, Kansas City. 1996.

Lesley Dill: The Poetic Body. Orlando Museum of Art, Florida. 1996.*

Voices in My Head. George Adams Gallery, New York. 1995.

Lesley Dill: An Installation. Gallery at Dieu Donne Papermill, New York. 1995.

Clothe My Naked Body. Quartet Editions, New York. 1995.

Frumkin/Adams Gallery, New York. 1993, 1995.

Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston. 1993, 1996.

Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans. 1993, 1994.* 1997.

Queens Museum, New York. 1992.*

Sandler-Hudson Gallery, Atlanta. 1992, 1993.

Dill, Dickson. Ann Jaffe Gallery, Miami. 1993.

Cracie Mansion Gallery, New York. 1991, 1994.

*catalogue

Selected Group Exhibitions

Issues of Identity in Recent American Art. Organized by Gibson Gallery, SUNY Potsdam, New York. 2001–2002.* (Traveling to University of Tennessee, Illinois State University, William Patterson University, additional venue TBA.)

Unbound: Reshaping Artist's Books. Henry Street Settlement, New York. 2000–2001.

Domesticity Revisited. The von Liebig Art Center, Naples, Florida. 2000.*

Ethereal & Material. Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Wilmington. 2000.*

Image as Text. Sawhill Gallery, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. 2000.

Back East: Artist's Books from the Northeastern States. San Francisco Center for the Book. 2000.

Recent Works. Jim Kempner Fine Art, New York. 2000.

Confluence: Artists' Books at Five Miles. Five Miles, Brooklyn, New York. 2000.

Heaven and Earth: The Figure in Religious and Secular Art. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. 2000.

Remnants of Memory: Contemporary American Art in Textile. Asheville Art Museum, North Carolina. 2000.*

Moving Picture Show—Featuring Lesley Dill, Sara Hornbacher, Elizabeth Prouvost, and Cornel Rubino with Dan Walsh. Dalton Galleries, Agnes Scott College, Atlanta. 2000.*

Beyond the Press: Innovations in Print. Hand Workshop Art Center, Richmond, Virginia. 2000.

Trunk Show. Zoller Gallery, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. 2000.

- The Likeness of Being*. DC Moore Gallery, New York. 2000.
- Contemporary Narratives in American Prints*. Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion, New York. 1999–2000.
- Female*. Wessel and O'Connor Gallery, New York. 1999.
- The Body in Question: Tracing, Displacing, and Remaking the Human Figure in Contemporary Art*. The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. 1999.
- Photog9@thomascohn.br*. Galeria Thomas Cohn, Sao Paulo, Brazil. 1999.
- Contemporary Art from India*. The Mary Place Gallery, Paddington, India. 1999.
- Body*. Salina Art Center, Kansas. 1999.
- Billboard: Art on the Road*. Mass MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts. 1999.*
- Looking Forward Looking Back*. Elaine L. Jacob Gallery, Detroit, Michigan. 1999–2002.* (Traveled to Houghton House Gallery, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona; Georgia State University School of Art and Design Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia; Audekman Arts Center, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts; Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California; University of Denver, Colorado; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland.)
- Art about Art*. George Adams Gallery, New York. 1999.
- Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art & Fashion*. Hayward Gallery, London. 1998–99.* (Traveled to Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany.)
- Twenty Years/Twenty Artists*. Maryland Institute/College of Art, Baltimore. 1998.
- List Gallery, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. 1998.
- Meza Fine Art, Coral Gables, Florida. 1998.
- Susan Cummins Gallery, Mill Valley, California. 1998.
- Obsessive Compulsive Order*. Hillwood Art Museum, Long Island University (C.W. Post Campus), Brookville, New York. 1998.*
- In the Details*. Barbara Gross Galerie, Munich. 1998.
- Bodies in Flux*. Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Summer 1998.
- Drawings IV*. Koplín Gallery, Los Angeles. 1998.
- Wellness, Disease and the Visual Arts Series—The Body Reclaimed: Self-esteem, Social Stature and Expression*. University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, ARTS, Iowa City. 1998.
- Burton/Marinkovich Gallery, Washington, D.C. 1997–98.
- Cohen Berkowitz Gallery, Kansas City. 1997–98.
- 1997 Collector's Show*. Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock. 1998.
- Group Exhibition*. Elena Zang Gallery, Woodstock, New York. 1997.
- Millennium Eve Dress*. Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati. 1997–98.
- New Edition*. Artfoundry, Santa Fe. 1997.
- Text and Touch*. Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York. 1997.
- Strong Spirits*. Fine Art Center Galleries, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. 1997.*
- Facets of Contemporary Sculpture*. Two Sculptors, Inc., New York. 1997.
- 5th Anniversary Celebration: Contemporary Art from the Frederick R. Weisman Collections*. Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu. 1997.
- READ: Text and Visual*. Gallery A, Chicago. 1997.
- A Show of Hands*. George Adams Gallery, New York. 1997.
- Instinct and Intellect*. Monique Knowlton Gallery, New York. 1997.
- Language as Object: Emily Dickinson and Contemporary Visual Arts*. Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Massachusetts. 1997.*
- Text and Identity: 12 Women Artists*. Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook, New York. 1997.*
- A Singular Vision: Prints from Landfall Press*. Milwaukee Museum of Art, Wisconsin; Museum of Modern Art, New York City. 1997.*
- REAL(ist) Women*. Selby Gallery, Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, Florida. 1997.*
- Suture*. Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, New York. 1997.
- Shirts and Skins: The Absent Figure in Contemporary Art*. Contemporary Museum, Honolulu. 1996–1997.
- Well Worn Text*. Columbia College Center for Book & Paper Arts, Chicago. 1996.
- Images of Self: The Search for Identity through Art*. Schick Art Gallery, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. 1996.
- Portraits and Self Portraits*. George Adams Gallery, New York. Summer 1996.
- Lesley Dill*. Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle. 1996.
- Alteration*. K & E Gallery, New York. 1996.
- In the Flesh*. Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield. 1995–1996.
- The Outer Layer*. New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, Summit. 1995.
- Hudson Valley Artists '95: Domestic Policies*. College Art Gallery, New Paltz, New York. 1995.
- Arts and Letters*. June Kelly Gallery, New York. 1995.
- Paper View*. Cohen Berkowitz Gallery, Kansas City. 1995.
- Women's Work: An Open Book*. HarperCollins Exhibition Space, New York. 1995.
- Essence and Persuasion: The Power of Black and White*. Anderson Gallery, Buffalo. 1995.*
- Reinventing the Emblem*. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. 1995.
- 5 Women Sculptors*. Organization of Independent Artists at XI Valparaiso Bienal, Valparaiso, Chile. 1994–1995.*
- Material Concerns*. Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, New York. 1994.
- Paint, Props, & Process*. Castle Gallery, College of New Rochelle, New York. 1994.

The Body Human. Nohra Haimé Gallery, New York. 1994.

Around the House. Frumkin/Adams Gallery, New York. 1994.

By A Hair's Breath. Elsa Mott Ives Gallery, YWCA, New York. 1994.

Paper Doll: Social Template. Police Building, Organization of Independent Artists, New York. 1994.

Disembodied. Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington. 1994.

Outside from Within: Paper as Sculpture. Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, University of the Arts, Philadelphia. 1994.*

Nine Sculptors and Their Printer: A Tribute to Solo Impressions. Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston. 1993.

White Men in Suits. Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo. 1993.

Return of the Cadave Exquis. Drawing Center, New York. 1993.

Addressing the Body. Patricia Shea Gallery, Santa Monica, California; Terrain Gallery, San Francisco. 1993.

The Rag Trade. InterArt Center, New York. 1993.

Idio Cognito. Police Building, Organization of Independent Artists, New York. 1993.*

Empty Dress: Clothing as Suorrgate in Recent Art. Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY; Schafler Gallery, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. 1993-96.

Spirit House. Installation. Willie Birch Sculpture Center, New York. 1993.

Fall from Fashion. Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT. 1993.*

Regarding Masculinity. Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans. 1993.

Songs of Retribution. Richard Anderson Gallery, New York. 1993.

Paper. Fawbush Gallery, New York. 1993.

Transparency. Luise Ross Gallery, New York. 1993.

Body and Soul. Philippe Staib Gallery, New York. 1993.

WAR. Trenkmann Gallery, New York. 1992.

Sense and Sensibility. Solo Press, New York. 1992.

FASHION. Trenkmann Gallery, New York. 1992.

Burning in Hell. Franklin Furnace, New York. 1991.

American Art Today: New Directions. Florida International University, Miami. 1991.*

Sense of Self. Triplex Gallery, Manhattan Community College, New York. 1990.*

*catalogue

Performances

Worst Case Scenario. P.S. 122, New York. April 22, 1999; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. June 4, 1998.

Paris Speaking Dress. Maison des Arts de Creteil, Paris. April 1996.*

Sometimes I Feel Skinless (with Donna Masini and Tom Sleigh). George Adams Gallery, New York. October 12, 1995.*

Speaking Dress. Guggenheim Museum (Soho), New York. 1994.

Dada Poem Wedding Dress. Dada Ball. Webster Hall, New York, October 12, 1994; Exit Art, New York, September 28, 1994.

Speaking Dress. Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York. May 3, 1994.

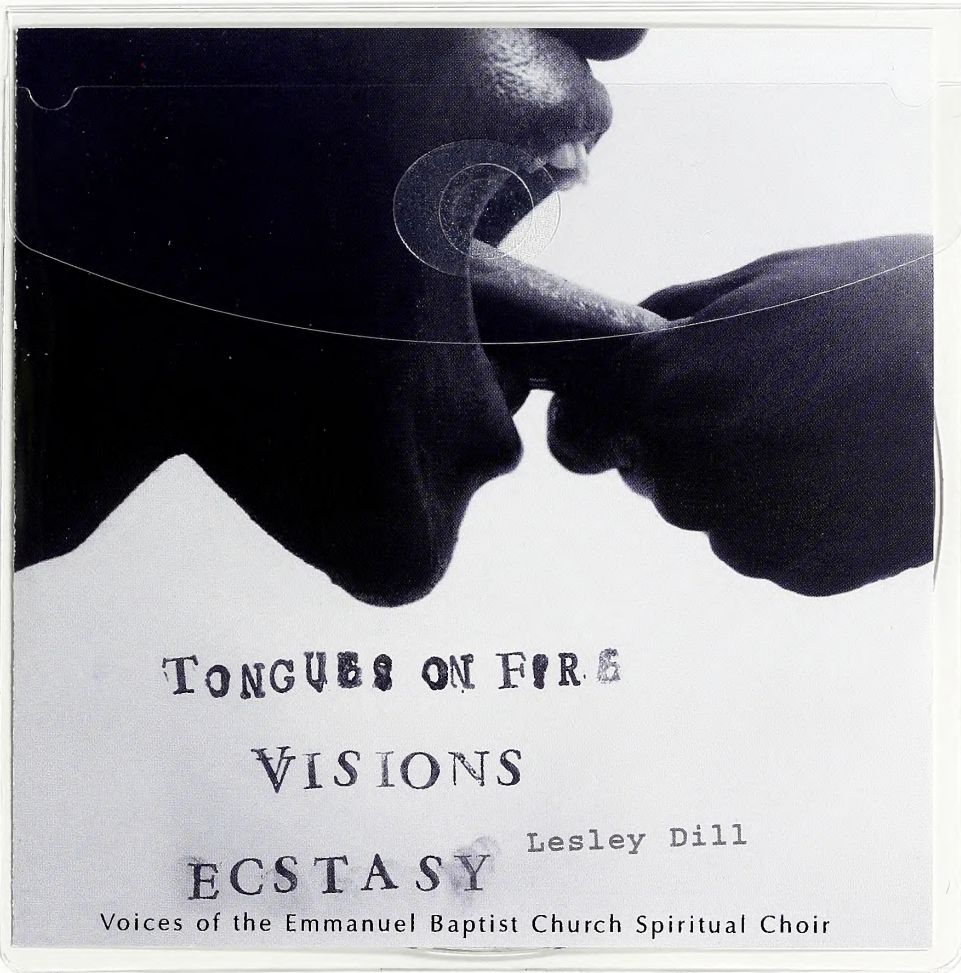
Speaking Dress (with Sue de Beer, Petra Katrina Haff, Erin Loughran and Allison Smith). The Kitchen, New York. April 2, 1994.

*on video

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...I had a dream I melted into nothingness.